

Book Four

OF THE COLLECTIVE SORROWS

EREZIEL

BY SHAUNA SOLAMAN

On the Wasp's Wings

CHAPTER ONE

Thursday, March 09, 2006 11:15:59 PM

The light filtered into my office, gracefully embracing everything that it came into contact with. I removed my glasses slowly and glanced out the window. I could see everything and yet nothing all the same. These old blue eyes were weak, but still well enough to appreciate everything that was occurring. Everything that I knew was occurring and could not see. I looked back down at the bleached white paper that laid before me on the desk. I rarely entered this old office that I had built into my house, but then I rarely frequented this house. A thin layer of dust coated everything, but shone beautifully, giving every object new life. Even the antique globe beside my bookcase felt somewhat new. I'm sure that every object in this office and house missed the attention. I so rarely gave anything my attention, so it would be Destiny that would find me here, behind this desk, reading that letter, in this old house.

I scanned over the letter again, but this time the letters were blurred. I didn't need to seem them clearly to know what they asked. The first time I read it, I cast it into memory, but still read it several times after that. It was another persistent letter from some lady wanting information. Anyone who knew about the secrets that went on behind the world's stage play wanted to know what I knew. There's no way to translate what I know. I smiled to my memories and went over to the safe, located in another part of this house.

As I walked slowly over, the memories of everything came alive. When did my life really stop? It never did, it kept going on without my consent. I held back the tears of every memory and kept within stride. I had nothing to prove to anyone, just to myself and to Talen. I already earned his love and respect, yet I still had to earn my own. I entered the old bedroom and walked over to the closet. Barely able to kneel, I managed to level myself to the safe. Clicking the numbers while rubbing the exterior of the safe, I heard and felt the inner mechanisms open. The door swung open so that I could pull out the one object in there. The small black box located within the safe was probably the only object that didn't have dust on it. I pushed the moth eaten teal skirt aside as I got up.

On the bed, I sat down with the small treasure. Lifting the gauze wrapped parcel out of the black box, I pushed everything aside, and watched the light illuminate the dust rising into the air. Slowly unwrapping the the gauze from the book, I exposed the three stitch-bound books. I ran my fingers over the cover of the book on the top. It's been years since I've even looked at these. I dropped the books into my lap and continued to watch the blurry dust rise. I didn't have to see it to know it was there. I left my glasses in the office and I didn't feel like wobbling back for it. I lived.

I picked the first book up and gently lifted the cover. It was a picture of my late wife and I, standing together on a beach. She worked diligently on this particular picture. She wanted my blonde hair and blue eyes to pierce the viewer and her brown eyes to be devoted to me. It was beautiful and it was perfectly preserved. Sadly this wasn't the only shrine to her. This entire house was abandoned when she died. The children and I continued to live here, but there was a vacancy. Then one day, we decided that the place was haunted by her absence. Until the day that she could grow to reclaim her place.

What everyone wants to know has nothing to do with me really. I am far too common, too lowly to pay any attention to. They want to know about her and our children. How do you translate the warmth you feel from holding someone who needed to be hugged? Or their soft breath when coming to reassure

you? Does it really matter if that person is an angel or does it matter that they gave you the time of day? I closed my eyes and felt at peace. I lost her, but I had my life and our two children and Talen. I had and still have everything every man dreams of before he can understand his dreams.

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and still have everything every man dreams of before he can understand his dreams.

I fingered the scrap booking paper that she meticulously glued. Most of which had fine print, so I could not make out what was written. I did know that she was very deliberate in her artwork. What I did not expect was the small flap that revealed a paper wasp. The small origami figure that held up to the light was created with such precision. She couldn't have possibly have done this, for she had no patience with origami. Yet, she must have gone through a lot to get it, especially for the wings, which stood out in my blurriness.

I blew my hair aside and gathered up the strength to go back into my office. With the books in hand and a cane in the other, my eyes glanced over the crevices of this house. I remember when I first contracted this house and when I designed the plans to it. I didn't know then that I'd marry her. Now, all I can see is her ghost dancing with the children while singing to me. She loved the colour teal.

I walked back into the office and took my seat. With a heavy sigh, I put back on my glasses and read that first page in clarity. "Love knows no boundaries," was the small writing on one of pieces of paper. "I'd love you forever if you'll have me." I smiled back at her carefulness. I could see her thinking about each piece as she laid it down. She created each book for me, but this was the only page of this book she filled out. She made the paper and bound them all together. Three hand crafted books from my wife. In each, she filled out the first page, because she had this strange idea that only something of utter importance should go on the first page. You might find it conceited that she would do that, but I asked her to. After she gave me the books, I asked that at some point she fill out the first page of each. For the first book, which was a beige colour, she placed the picture of us. In the second, darker beige, were pictures of our two children, Nahit and Risan. The third, much darker than the other two, but still light enough to write in, she put a picture of Talen and myself. I didn't have to look in order to know what she selected. I intuitively knew, long before I even began using them. When I finally did get around to using them, tear poured into each page.

This first book I used while she was still alive. She wrote in it several times herself and even added more pictures.

I'd give anything to be with her. Yet somehow, I doubt she'll ever have me again. I was lucky in this lifetime, but never again. I've fallen into good graces with Talen, but she's a creature that has long left. I can't help but think that in another lifetime though, it'll happen the same way.

Orchestrate a New Beginning

CHAPTER TWO

Wednesday, March 15, 2006 14:17:37

Her gift was eagerly received, just as many others would be as she saved nothing in honouring me with lavish gifts. Through the thin lenses of my glasses, I carefully watched each word and dedication. I moved my hands to the draw and pulled it out to find a few old pens, a manila envelope and a couple of books. Everything pertained to work, so I assumed it all to be outdated. I quickly scanned over my pens and selected the blue fountain pen.

My memories belong to no one but myself. However, my children in addition to myself am entitled to everything that I have come to know. What is a legacy if you have no care for anyone trully seeking? My children were born with the infinite foresight, thus making life interesting. Perhaps the keepers of

this failed legacy wants to know how a mere human can handle the world when they shouldn't have been invited in the first place. I am not the first human to find themselves intertwined in this world, in fact I am the second to Adam's care.

I should begin by describing how I first met my wife or maybe even Adam himself, when he was just Shaun and I was just Eric. Shaun Tannen, who later became the Adam of my life, I had heard about long before I had met him. Not that long, but his reputation preceded him to his dismay. I was in England studying mathematics and consorting with the sciences, when the professors were first selecting which students would be brought into the university under scholarships. A young man in the States was already advanced in his scientific studies, undertaking various subjects all while in high school. He was advanced in medicine. I had been studying at the university for a year and already was somewhat of the "golden child" to the department. That was the name they gave me themselves.

Shaun and I became great friends rather quickly, soon we began planning to move to my hometown in Australia. Before he could commit to such a leap, he'd have to consider me close, and in order to give me that much, I'd have to meet his family. His family was rather small, consisting of a foster father and a god-sister. I knew that his biological parents died in a car accident and that his foster mother was killed. I also knew that within his foster family he had a grandmother, aunt and uncle, though I didn't meet the three at the time. Instead we stayed at his father's house in Long Island. His god-sister came up to visit. It should have struck me as odd at the time, but it didn't. Shauna, the god-sister, was never referred to (by him) as his god-sister or sister. Actually his father made the point that Shaun was a guardian to Shauna, and that was the extent of the relationship. Furthermore, they were not referred to by their real names. "Shaun Tannen the Talented" was called "Talen" for short, or "Chronos." Shauna was referred to as "Firefly" or "Morphenia," and any variants of such. I suppose the repetitious "Shaun" was bothersome when she visited.

The first encounter with the family unit was rather easy going. His father picked us up at the airport and drove us out to the house, which was just on the beach. The house structure was quite extraordinary, but what really astonished me were the partitioned sections that had glass walls. Even the grand piano that stood alone by a fireplace with a few chairs. The house was just one floor, but was quite spacious. The entrance leads right into the kitchen and one would be able to view to the right the glass room with the piano and scattered chairs with the fireplace (not in full view, but that's the gist of the room). To the left was a door that led to the rooms but additionally, in the glass room, a large sofa and television set. The rooms were divided into three, one for each member.

When we got in, his father excused himself and left, stating that he had to catch a firefly. Shaun smirked as he began setting up some hot water so that we could have tea. It wasn't a code, but Shaun assumed that I'd realize that that meant that Shauna would be joining us for the weekend. Shaun and I were going to stay for the entire week, but she was going to visit for the few days. After he made me tea, he excused himself and went to the rooms.

After an hour, Shaun resurfaced stating that I would be sleeping in Shauna's room and that she would sleep with him. I nodded and then we went to go watch the television for a bit. After a few hours, the front door swung open and she came bouncing in with his father dragging himself. When she got to the room we were in, she peered in. Shaun took a sip of his cold tea and then smiled at her. "Firefly, causing trouble?" "Nnnh. Trouble is far too easy," came a low reply. "Who is that?" Shaun looked over at me and then replied that I was his friend and my name was Eric. She moved herself from the doorway and I got to see her full view. She was eight, with messy dark brown hair and dark brown eyes. Shaun put down his cup and then she walked slowly over to him. "Watching?" she asked. "No.

Waiting.” They sat down together and quietly watched the program together. The world sort of fades away when they are together, at least for a moment. Maybe an hour so later, I had reached my level of discomfort and was beginning to squirm in the silence. “What’s your whole name?” she asked me. “Eric Craven Raganavok,” I said to her. “You have a middle name, how lucky. I don’t, and neither does Talen.”

“You’re very pretty,” she said some time later to me. I looked down at this little eight year old and looked back and my eighteen year old friend (I was nineteen at the time) and could see him wildly amused. “I brought you some cake Firefly.” “You had better! You flew all the way to England and left me here. I expect cake!”

When you see someone the first time, it’s a normal experience. You always see people. It’s hard to distinguish who will prove themselves to be more than just another person. You meet the next few times and it builds. When you meet someone and you’ve fallen in love with them, something new burns. It’s almost as if a flame of friendship turns a new colour.

I fell in love with Talen (he is adamant of using his real name in business and in privacy but the false name is for anything else that need not use his real name, although this is in privacy, my children prefer the name Talen, as it creates a special being aside from the beloved Shaun that they know). He was wonderful and beautiful. With him, I’ve travelled the world with appreciation for the arts and languages. When he met his wife, Teri (her false name is Silen), it was a pleasure to be around them. Better yet, it was pleasure to share joys with another couple.

My first girlfriend was Renee Mersieux. She was extravagant and vivacious when I was shy and demure. She was a linguist with a fine appreciation for arts. It’s rather odd that my parents endorsed artistic talents within me and I chose sciences and mathematics over it. Yet I had surrounded myself in artistic people. My girlfriend, my best friend and his girlfriend (Silen was a classics major and ballet dancer). I don’t speak much about Renee. We had dated for many years and had even gotten engaged. She...

The First Treaded Line

CHAPTER THREE

Wednesday, March 15, 2006 14:53:15

The first time I met Shauna, she was eight. I’ve mentioned that, I know. I met with her several times after that, usually with Talen. Talen and Silen would make a point to go to the States to see his father and their Firefly. After Renee’s death, I kept to myself for the most part. Talen would convince me to come out to the States to stay at the beach house that would bring me peace. Sometimes I’d run into her and sometimes she wouldn’t come at all. As Shauna got older, the visits lessened, which were largely due to various ailments or just the fact that it was out of the way. It didn’t matter much either way, since I saw her as Talen’s younger sister. After Talen’s father died, there was a noticeable change in everything. Talen and Silen had a pretty strong and grounded relationship, which just became completely solid. The change was more so the dynamics between Talen and Shauna. They shifted into a relationship that marked that of a parent and child. Or something else that I couldn’t quite put my finger on. He became a true guardian, making more visits into the States, with or without Silen or myself.

That’s when I saw her differently. Once I made a trip to the States with Talen, but he was going to give a lecture. I was going since I would corroborate his research. We were going over some notes before it

was time to present when Shauna walked in. A bit taller then I had last recalled (although I couldn't remember what age I was comparing her to prior), with longer hair and eyes sunken behind a pair of thin framed glasses. She looked quite thin. Talen didn't even look up when she walked in and she didn't say anything, except walk over to the coffee machine and grab some. "Would you like?" she asked. I said no and thanked her. She grabbed two insulated cups and poured, then began setting them up. She brought them over and sat down next to Talen. "How was your flight?" I said that it was fine. Secretly I wondered why he wasn't speaking to her and why she looked like a mess. Still he was going over his work not saying a thing. "Is everything okay between the two of you?" I almost asked before he hugged her. "You know, he doesn't know that you speak to me even in silence and one could mistake that," she said to him. "Sorry, between this and you, it's all hard to juggle. How was the treatment?" "Annoying," she answered before sipping from her coffee. "It can't be that bad, you smell like jasmines," he said and then returned to his work. She was different because she had lost a god father, gained a guardian, and shared the same sickness that he did. The only person that could understand her and her world was the person that sat on her left.

Slowly over time, the fullness and colour returned, leaving a mark of yellow to remind us that she is forever sick. The next time my vision of her changed was when she was twenty. Once in her youth, when Renee accompanied us to our visit to the States, Shauna very happily said to me that one day I will love her. Renee thought it was cute and Talen was amused (as usual) because Renee had no idea what she'd inevitably do to herself and I had no idea just how right Shauna was.

Seeing Shauna in a different light was simple enough. My feelings over time grew, much unknown to me. Talen kept pictures of her everywhere, though rarely spoke of her. He would mention when she had operations and how she did. Nothing too in depth, nothing concerning relationships, friendships, school, etc. Although I saw her maybe twice per year, I didn't grow with her presence. Instead I grew with the idea of her. What I learned about her is different than the normal person. Talen spared me no expense in revealing the truth about what they really were. I had fully grasped the idea that Shauna forever did belong to some guy who lived in England, named Chris. They didn't have to be together to belong to one another. They were just bound to one another. Just as Talen himself, living in Australia with his wife and his best friend the house over, was bound to some guy named Vinzce, in Egypt. In some weird way, the four were always connected to one another.

It did take him sometime to reveal everything. That should be expected given the circumstances.

I saw her at twenty and she was quite new. I had seen her grow in pictures and heard of the operations that saved her life (and the donations given to Talen to save his, and vice versa). I had known that she was forlorn and discontent, but had a happy façade. On that Halloween, of her twentieth year, she asked me out on a date. Knowing that Halloween was representative of Talen and Silen's anniversary and Shauna's favourite day, I declined. If I ever screwed up, then the day would be tainted. She didn't mind the decline. The next day, I asked her out.

At that point, I knew everything that I needed to know and I also had permission from Talen and a certain Chris from a far distance.

Releasing the Paper Collection

CHAPTER FOUR

Wednesday, March 15, 2006 10:18:17 PM

Have you ever wondered why some people compare humans to creatures? I wondered why Talen called

Shauna “Firefly.” I asked him a few times, but he would begin humming some sort of classical music piece, usually by Antonín Dvořák. Then again, I wonder why wasps became my trademark and hornets to Talen. I did enjoy making the little paper wasps, but never understood how it just became me.

Won't this take you back?

The art of paper wasps wasn't something I took lightly. Origami in general was a meaningless pastime that I used to keep focus on things. During class others would doodle or drift into thoughts that were of significance to them. I on the other hand would select pieces of paper and begin folding away to maintain focus on the class material.

I wouldn't hold luck responsible for Talen and I meeting. I was a former aide to the science departments, so I certainly knew the professor teaching this session. At that point I began assisting various professors throughout the mathematics department, but nothing could keep me away from the sciences. Noticing new students was another minor task I assigned to myself. I would keep track of who remained dedicated and who wasn't. Prior to his arrival, there was already anticipation for the student who won a scholarship for outstanding and advance work. His name was Shaun Tannen and the few professors who decided to award him, watched over him carefully from afar. Not just them, but anyone who meant something to the department of science. On the first day, I noticed him; I was heading to class when I was stopped by an old professor of mine. He mentioned a few things and then let me continue on my way. This moment made me late for class, so as I walked in, my current instructor gave me a stern look. I nodded to him and watched his frown slowly curl into a smile. He motioned over to the far corner of room by the window. There was an empty desk with his folder on it. He knew that I liked to be in the sunlight, so had saved me a seat in the packed classroom. I'm sure the new students found this strange and probably mistook me for an aide, rather than a former aide. I saw him though, I didn't know who he was then, but something struck me.

Quiet as a mouse with black hair that was a bit long, he fiddled with his glasses as he stared out the window. I took my seat and began pouring my attention into the work being taught while my hands created the wasps. I am fortunate enough that my professor knew that this was normal for me. He had seen me several times divert handiwork from attention. It seemed that I had my own special agreement with everyone in the department that I had previously worked with (even the one I was working with). Other students would allow their attention to wane and get caught and called on to correct it. Not I, because should the professors ever needed to make an example of me, I was ready.

Once, in another class, the professor asked me to teach in his place. I was astounded that that was even possible. He had gotten clearance from the head of the department so long as he supervised me. I taught the class while the professor sat his desk, terribly amused at how they reacted to me. I was not much older than these people; they were my colleagues, not my students. A few times I caught a glance of him and I would feel myself tensing up. He would stare back at me quite bemused with everything. He was like the professor, completely involved and yet entirely amused with me. I winced a few times, but carried along well. From that day, I resigned him to a hornet and when I returned to my place in class, I began making paper hornets for the hell of it.

Later that day, when I returned to my apartment, I held Renee close. I told her about the new origami pieces I was making and why. She laughed before she said that she absolutely had to meet the newest insect in my collection.

When we were older, I showed Talen the insects I had meticulously folded. In awe he looked over each

piece and seemed so mesmerized by it. Then after a while, his cheeks flushed and he said that he was the hornet, I was the wasp, and somehow, we were all insects in this vast world. You can interpret that any way you want. That night I decided that I'd add fireflies, butterflies and moths to my collection of origami insects. When I presented him the full collection, he kissed my hands. Talen was an artist who had a mind for science; he could appreciate anything, if only the world would allow him to.

Talen married Silen on their fifth anniversary. This occurred after Renee committed suicide, before Talen's father committed suicide and that it was discovered that Shauna shared the same medical issues that Talen himself did. It was before Shauna and Chris claimed they couldn't be together and before she became distraught over a failed relationship. It was before she grew and changed. It was when the entire world seemed simple enough.

How foolish is the human that steps out of the world created just for them.

Talen took his paper wasp, hornet, moth, butterfly and firefly and had them set in a deep frame. He keeps it in his office along with various pictures of the same people. Sometimes when I used to pass by his office, he'd be off in another world, staring at them. He had a magnificent imagination. I could picture him seeing himself riding on the wings of rather large insects as he escaped reality. I didn't know any better, nor can I say our colleagues did either. One day, you enter a new world and you don't turn back.

It happens. It happens when one day, you've noticed how you and your friends have all aged, not by much, but slightly so while your best friend still remains youthful. It's when you notice that they have new bruises that disappear within hours. Or when they say, "Craven, my dear, I have to tell you something that you won't believe." You listen intently, hanging on their every word. You hear them say it and still stare in disbelief. Then you watch the very same origami insect collection you made them come to life and fly out the window. Time means nothing here. This is the legacy I leave my children.

The Step before the Edge

CHAPTER FIVE

Wednesday, March 15, 2006 11:25:46 PM

"To my children, you have all fallen in and out of love. I am but a poor man that was lucky enough to be in your life. I have nothing to teach you, all I have is love."

Eric put his pen down and stared at what he wrote. He stared out the window and studied the deep colour of green on the tree. The tree was out there as a family effort. Now it became the dark green that Risan loved. Nahit became a loner, something that was predestined. It was Nahit's will to always be forlorn, so he had done everything to make him comfortable. Two children, one now twenty-six and the other eighteen. Ages didn't matter since they go beyond normal years. Nahit surpassed Risan by many years, but Risan passed his brother on complexity and growth. Both of which outlived Eric by many years, just as Talen and his own wife did. Her death came ten years earlier, she was already reincarnated somewhere new.

"The world is a little bit different than you're actually used to. There are a couple planes that easily coexist with one another. In addition there are also a few species. You don't see them, because you never thought to. Or perhaps we won't allow you to." He paused to breathe and pointed towards the paper insects as they came to life. "I haven't given them life, for that would be fruitless. Rather, I've given you the vision to see that grimoires exist and they move about freely." "I hesitated to tell you

about this because this opens new dimensions to you.” I listened quietly to the man I called my best friend. Who was now taking away my entire world. I hated him cruelly for that moment. “I love you,” Talen said quietly. I was shocked by the thought that he had read my mind. Nonsense! He smiled as he twirled a pen around in his slender fingers. “I can. I don’t do it often because I love you and I’d hate to betray your trust. Now I’m trusting you with something much bigger. I’m trusting you with my complete identity. Not just mine, but Shauna’s as well.” Speechless, I remained. “The species, in order are as listed: angels, animals, biotis, humans, and grimoires. Angels are the highest and most powerful, the eldest possess the most power. You know animals, but biotis are a cross between animals and humans. Then there are humans and finally grimoires, which are ghosts without shells, or bodies if you will. They are spirits that roam free, simply because death dealers have chosen to not deal with them.” I finally was able to sputter out, “Why are you telling me this?” “I love you, it’s that simple,” was his response. “I can allow you to see the world as I see it and if you should become afraid, I can take it back.” He paused to see my reaction and then said, “No, you need to rest.”

He trusted me with his world. It took a while for me to reconcile the way I once looked at the world with a new vision. He never did allow me to see the world as he did; I just knew that there was more. He didn’t have to show me powers for me to believe and trust in him. Several years were spent with me faithfully at his side without questioning. I could have and perhaps should have questioned, but that would have been foolish on behalf. They would give me the proof I needed when they figured I’d be ready.

I had fallen in love with Shauna after I learned what she was. I doubt that effected my emotions much. It just made me aware of what Talen had advised me about earlier. Shauna was actually Lilith – the Phoenix, who belonged to Jibril, the Dragon, or Chris if you will. Talen was really Adam, that was complete with Azrael or Vinzce. The four together were the ones who oversaw the world. They didn’t drag me into their world. I always felt that I had trespassed. However Adam and Lilith spared no expense in making sure I was comfortable. Our children, the adopted Nahit from India, was actually Mikhail, who shared the light of Lilith and Azrael. Then Christopher Andre or Risan, born to my wife, was the shared efforts of Lilith and Jibril, otherwise known as Sephiroth. The had all lived millions of years, choosing when to enter these lowly cycles so that they could experience different sorts of life. And there I was. I, Eric Craven, beloved to Adam and Lilith, the “father” to Mikhail and Sephiroth, was the human that entered their world. And the line of Mahesa is dying to know what it was like, not to be pre-selected, but to fall into the mix and be truly loved.

My dear children, you’ll have to afford me this luxury of never revealing my truth. I loved your mother dearly as I’m sure she loved me. I could go on about how she spent every moment with me while we were together. How I adorned her with everything she could ever want (and you both know that she doesn’t require much, but that’s beside the point). From movies to the theatre, from one continent to the next, I gave her everything she could ever dream of. My goal was to make her happy because she made me happy. When you two came along, I knew that I was in no way truly responsible. I knew that the death dealers had prepared slots for you and that the two Deaths meticulously planned where you would end up. They warned me that I may harvest false or malicious intentions, because rare is the situation that a human realizes that they’ve taken part in a reincarnation cycle of an angel (or biotis). I still loved you and adorned you too, with everything you could ever want. You each grew into your own. Nahit, you’re a loner that’s desperately afraid of love because of a past life. You seek servitude while you are the grandest creation ever. Risan, you’re a troublemaker that cares only for family. Still I cannot help but remember the times I held you in my arms and whispered how much I loved you. When you were old enough, you’d whisper back the same thing.

What's it like being human in an angelic family? I don't know. It's a matter of how loved you are. And that goes beyond species.

Slowly he sighed and then put down the pen. He ran his fingers over the paper before deciding to close the book. He looked up, not surprised to see Talen sitting at the other side of the desk. "My old friend," Talen began. "Shaun, why is it you don't look a day over twenty? You're fifty-four!" Eric exclaimed. "Time has it's ways." "I've noticed." "You haven't pulled that book out in years." Eric smiled and looked up at the ceiling, "I haven't been in this house in years." Talen smiled and then winked when Eric caught his smile. "You've aged well." Eric couldn't help but admire his old friend's demeanor. "You tell me that everyday, just as you tell me --" Talen cut him off by quickly saying, "That I love you everyday as well. Old habits don't take extinction well. You must always let the people you love know that you love them. All else is a waste." "Have you come to take me Death?" Talen looked at Eric helplessly, "I have not. I'm sorry. Your sons and even Lilith is well." "They aren't my sons anymore," Eric trailed off as he looked down. "They call you father. They've put in a request to be born to you again. I think they consider you a true father." Eric's face lightened at this. "So they did love me after all." "Who couldn't? This visit does have another intent however, my love. I have come to ask something of you. Ordinarily, under such circumstances, we would not award you the choice. However, I," Talen paused. "Yeah, I know, you love me. You wear your feelings on your blushing face. I know how difficult this is for you," Eric said to him. "I'm sorry, you're special, not just to me, but to Lilith, Mikhail, and Sephiroth. You also have the respect and adoration of Jibril and Azrael. In our world, that's a pretty big thing. You know that. You were and still are my left handed wizard of reality, my wife is my right and my charge is ahead." "You're rambling Shaun."

"Your son, the eldest, is trying to write his memoirs. He's been stuck for some time. Risan helps him out once in a while. However he seems quite apprehensive to the entire idea. I wonder what made him take on such a task." Eric looked over Talen quietly. That was unlike his son. Perhaps the line of Mahesa contacted him as well. Nahit was a natural writer and given the challenge, he'd surely take it on. However Nahit needed a reason and history was not reason enough.

As Talen rose from his chair, the black clothes whipped around him. He walked over to Eric and lifted his chin. "You shouldn't be here alone, not in this ancient shrine." Eric stared into Talen's dark brown eyes. Talen kissed him and then helped him up. "Come now, we'll take the books and we'll go elsewhere."

You're Bound To What You Were

CHAPTER SIX

Thursday, March 16, 2006 11:04:51 AM

Slender hands and wrists make for artistic people.

My name is a mystery that my parents thought up of while in England. My mother, Miha Atanasia was vocal about politics, as an avid student of the law should be (that's her claim). My father, Acelin Waldhramm, was quiet and subtle engineer student that attended the same university as my mother. They were irrevocably drawn to one another. They never went into very many details, but my mother said that she was always drawn to my father, like a moth to a flame. They met casually in a restaurant on one fateful eve and hit off of there and then. Father indulged in my mother's vivaciousness and even shed his own quite demeanor. After they began dating, father decided that he wanted to change career paths, thus leading him down a rocky road of biotechnology. He never said what possessed him to make such a change and mother respected his wishes. After three years together, they got married and

bought a small apartment to live together. Soon after the marriage I was conceived. Mother describes my birth as the most painful moment of her gray days. Then I entered the world and brought light with me. She had a way of making anyone feel at ease, but let's attribute that to a natural bias to the woman that gave me life.

Although I was born in England to a German father and a half Slovenian and half Romanian mother, I was raised in Glebe, Australia. After they attained their degrees and some footing in the world, they moved to Australia to raise me. Although they were mostly light-hearted, they had very strict teaching regime. When I was old enough, I reached out to a cookie jar on the table. My mother was looking thoughtfully at the empty pan on the stove when she noticed me. "Little Raven!" she exclaimed happily, "What slender little hands you have." I didn't know what her drive was, but I was sure she had seen them before. "Time for you start piano lessons! After all, slender hands and wrists make for artistic people!" Then she returned to her world of figuring out what to cook. Several days later, father announced that he had bought a square piano for me, over a dinner he cooked himself for the family.

I was named Eric Craven Raganavok and it was not explained how I procured such a name. I inherited my father's blonde hair and blue eyes. I probably inherited most traits from my father, since I can identify so little with my mother. Perhaps if I ever had a sibling, they would have modelled themselves after our mother. Alas, I lack such a camaraderie. They were great people and the world may not know that, but I certainly do. I am a product of them, so perhaps through me; others can know what great mysterious people they are. Together they helped nurture anything that might have been of service to me in the future. In addition to the piano, I was trained on dulcimer. They also made sure that I had an ample amount of art classes in congruence to various languages. To this day, I rarely paint, practice music, nor use some of the languages I learned. Instead I became a doctor, but they are still proud.

I have no cousins nor aunts and uncles. I barely knew my grandparents before they died. Yet I wasn't alone. I was given everything I could ever need in life, especially love.

Some time after mastering the square piano, father got a grand piano so that he could hear me play. I was sent to extra art classes and taught the value of colours. Everything was a fine art to be mastered, even if it was outside of the realm of art, according to my mother. Father listened and did everything that she wanted most of the time. It wasn't that he didn't have a say, he just didn't disagree. My father found it quite surprising when he realized that I had taken to solving mathematical equations, rather than painting butterflies. Things don't happen the way you plan. Mother didn't mind, though sometimes she would tell me that she wished that she bought me more brain teasers. She had worked so hard in nurturing the arts that she left me to tend to sciences. Obviously I was better suited, but she would have liked to be a part of that.

When it came to Nahit, I knew that he found himself closer to Shauna. It was Shauna and Mariel who traveled together and then happened upon him. It was Shauna who recognized him right away and immediately pressed for adoption. We had been married for less than three years, at that time. Yet when she called me from far, I packed my things and came to see the child that we would come to know as our evening star.

My parents were great with me. I did question my own ability so I was frightened when I received the call. It was late and I heard the ring. I had set a different ring tone for her. I picked up the phone happily. I always enjoyed her on the phone, especially when she ran out of things to say. She would call for various sorts of reasons, to ask me personal questions ("What's your favourite cookie?") or to tell me that she loves me. It was all rather lovely and I enjoyed every moment. Now that she was away

from me, she called less, but sent more messages or e-mails. After answering, I noticed her wavering voice. My heart skipped a few beats as my mind raced through thoughts trying to figure out why her voice trembled so. "How does being a father strike you?" she asked. I looked over at a pictured frame on the wall and smiled. No, not pregnant, she's found something she's been looking for. "I never thought about it before. But it doesn't strike me as odd," I answered confidently. I knew that my confidence would ease her. "Do you think I'd make a good mother?" "Not really, but I'm sure you'll give it your best shot." She began laughing and we talked about it some more. Within that same conversation, I felt in my heart that I already had son and she hung up feeling that she was a mother. We had a family and somehow, we were almost like my own family.

My mother was artistic, but her parents never bothered to nurture it within her. Some days she'd take off from work and decide to bake pastries or sweets for me before hitting the canvas. She'd paint wonderful things that no one ever saw. Well, I saw and so did my father, but that was it. Father and I would sometimes go into the small room that she dedicated to art. Father would add in a few touches if she asked, I on the other hand, would actually paint with her. She'd set up my own easel to conduct my own pieces. A few of them she hung up around the house. Whenever we'd have guests over, she'd make no mention that I painted them and I preferred it that way. Father would slip and tell them, but that didn't happen often. They were great parents and I wondered if I would be anything like them.

As I packed a small suitcase to head off for an adventure, I wondered about this child of seven. What would he like? What would I like? What would this situation be like? How well did he take to Shauna and how well would he take me? Such questions ran through my mind till finally I decided I could take it no longer. I picked up the phone and called Talen. "What was it like being adopted" I blurted out when I heard his voice. His voice was a comfort that I indulged in. Yet sometimes, I felt like a child that had found solace and warmth. I acted too damn childish and that was wrong. Talen laughed, "She found him, eh? About time too. I can tell that you can barely contain yourself." "Tell me about what it was like for you." I sat down on the bed and listened to his soft and gentle words. "I rejected families that didn't seem right. When mom came, I was anxious and annoyed. She came as a teacher that fell in love with me. Then her husband came along and the two knelt before me and asked if I wanted to be adopted. That sort of behaviour isn't strange. What was strange was how they argued for a while before asking me. Dad was upset that she had not mentioned that they were interested in adopting me. It was my choice and my love that they were begging for and felt that I should have the right to know. It's hard to tell the onlookers and admirers from the people that you're supposed to be with. It's a gambling chance that you take. All you have to do, very sadly, is be yourself and hope that they see you for you." "This kid, he's an angel isn't he?" Talen laughed lightly, "Yes, this child is Mikhail. He'll go with you regardless of how rude or mean you are. Simply because you are with his creator." My hopes sunk after this. This wasn't about being chosen, this was a matter of convenience. So then I would love him and hope to have his love in return. "Craven, Mikhail is sure to love you. He's heard much of you already and he knows that Lil and I fancy you." I was already so loved that I was afforded special privileges.

When I was younger, my father brought home a die cast model of the Lindbergh's NX 211. I had painted it red so now, in it's old age, some of the original paint had chipped away. I kept it in my closet for some reason unbeknownst to me. After hanging up the phone, I went over to my closet and fished out the small toy. It was in a small box, carefully protected. I put it into my suitcase and left.

A few days later, with my wife, I went to go meet this child. I could imitate Talen's experience, but then this small child would know. This child was really Mikhail, the keeper of knowledge, the healer of all things. I inhaled deeply and knelt down to look at him as he played with some marbles on the ground. I pulled out the toy and showed it to him. "My father gave me this and I always told myself I'd

give this to my own child. And since I started thinking of you as my child a few days ago, when my wife called me to tell me about you, I feel it's only right. Even if you don't think of me the same way." Nahit pulled out the small plane and looked it over with intrigue. Then Shauna knelt beside me and said, "He's a doctor too." Nahit broke into a toothy smile and laughed at the strangeness of it all.

We eventually brought Nahit home and one day while I was cooking for him, I noticed his slender wrists. I thought to myself, "He'd make a good artist with those slender fingers and thin wrists." I didn't say anything to him, although I was surprised at myself. He looked up at me and began singing about the new friend he made (which was a bird he had come across).

What You Loved (Hidden)

CHAPTER SEVEN

Thursday, March 16, 2006 11:58:18 AM

Talen led Eric over to a chair and helped him get seated. "You're pristine," Eric said to him. "Children?" Talen looked down at the floor thoughtfully and gathered his thoughts before answering. "Uye has been busy with school and Vincent has been taken with lurking." Eric laughed, "Yes, one child that shies away and the other that over-indulges, both equally complex." "We're all cut from the same material," Talen said as he turned towards the cabinets that stored the cups. "How dare you. We're all made from the same substance as you and you willingly shrug it off and if it were nothing," Eric rasped. Talen smiled at him and then set the cups up. "How many years has it been? Still with the tea and pleasantries," Eric continued, "Even after everything!" Talen smiled and began pouring tea for the two of them. After doing so, he put the sugar and milk in Eric's cup and then handed it to him. Talen sat down across from him and remained quiet. "I dislike when you're quiet, because you most certainly are not normally." Talen nodded towards the books that he had placed next to Eric. "What have you written about?" Eric looked down at the books, "Children and wife. I'd write about work, but I think we've enough writers in the field. I'd write about the things I've learned, but then it would look like fiction. I'd write about you, but then..."

But then they'd really have to know about Talen.

"So I was right!" Talen exclaimed, "You do love me!"

How could I not?

Sometimes when I think back about my time with Talen, time has no meaning. He's come to mean a lot to me, more so than I could have ever envisioned. I had friends prior to him, in previous schools, even in the university that we met. He's just an overpowering force, I guess. He's very selective of who he loves and with that, he becomes protective of them. It's a small group, I'm sure I mentioned this before. He...

"But then?" Talen asked. Eric looked up and gathered his thoughts again. "I can't bring myself to write about you." Talen mused in his cup, "I wonder why. I can write about you, I mean, I have. I don't speak on personal matters, but then I rarely do that anyway." "You're an enigma and I'd hate to give you away." Talen grinned at him and Eric relaxed in seeing that toothy grin. Talen always had a beautiful smile, just an overall beautiful sense of being. He was a force and every one he loved, loved him in return. They could see no wrong when he's done something. Not that he ever did anything wrong to begin with. "Your wife?" Talen kept his gaze consistent on Eric, "She's fine, in Ferrol, resting." "I haven't been there in ages." "You don't want to go there, that's why you haven't been there." "I was

just commenting, doesn't mean that I want to go."

"Do you love me?" Eric blinked at the question, unsure if that was the past or was the present. Talen smiled, "Lost in time? Yes, I did just ask. I knew that would snap you out of whatever lost feeling you were enduring. I mean, I could have asked you to explain something that would have been beneficial. But rather, I like to see your cheeks flush when asked." Eric looked at him, "I'm an old man." "We're both old men." "Yes, but I look the age." "Fine." "I think I've proven that I love you time and time again." "I'm needy." "You're not." Talen smiled, "Fine, but it's cute and I cannot help myself." "You still love an old face like mine?" "Of course, I don't think I could bring myself to stop. Which is why we must speak of something important." "I want to see her."

See her in your dreams, Eric. Because she does not belong to you. She doesn't belong to anyone. She belongs to the sun, as I belong to the earth. "Shut up and kiss me."

Talen held on to his right arm as they walked slowly towards the destination. There in the clearing, beyond the trees and a bit past the playground was a girl. She looked about ten years old. "What is she doing here?" "Better question is to ask what do we look like being here?" Eric looked at her in disbelief and felt his tears brim. "When you die," Talen held him closer, "she's going to be ten years older than you. She has dark brown hair and gray eyes. You'll have to find her if you want to be with her." Now you know what she looks like in youth. Do you think you'll find her without help? "How will I find you?" Eric asked him. Talen drew him near and hugged him. "I'll find you, I have to." "But doesn't that--" "I guess it will always be easy. I have to find her and I have to find you. In a way, we'll all meet again." Eric buried his face in Talen's hair and hoped the tears would subside. "Is it time?" Talen sought his hand and brought it up to his face. "Not yet. I was just honouring your request. You wanted to see one of the women you loved. I can allow this because I am her guardian and you are honest and genuine in your request."

I can't write about you Talen. Not yet. I love you and there's so much to tell. But not yet.

The Art of Being Yours

CHAPTER EIGHT

Friday, March 17, 2006 8:35:29 PM

"Time travel and travelling large distances at short times. It's enough to drive anyone mad. I was a rational man for nineteen years, prior to meeting Talen. He gave me time before turning my world inside out, but that would only add two or three years to my sanity, or ignorance as a human in a trully diverse world. The other thirty something years, I've been caught up in tornadoes. One must learn to detach themselves from this world to the next. Humanity is capable of it, mostly so in youth when they are open to such experiences. The older you are though, the harder it is to depart from the rut and hang yourself." Eric paused to look over his writing. He looked over the book to check over what had happened over the last few days (or was it hours?). He had gone to the old home in Australia to retrieve the books, there Talen met him and escorted him to Talen's home in England, and then they went somewhere to check on the reincarnation. Talen didn't reveal the location that they were at and Eric attributed that to a failure to mention, rather than just not willing to say. Talen had his ways but he was rather direct. If he didn't want you to know something, then he'd tell you he didn't want you to know.

Eric had spread the three books out on the dining room table and inspected them quietly to himself. He was in a friend's house in Arizona. "You are too old to be doing that," came a soft voice. He glanced up to see Jung walking in with two mugs. "Apple cider for me and tea for you," Jung said as he handed the

cup to him. "Jung," he began while reaching out to receive the mug, "have I been a good friend?" Jung looked at him thoughtfully and then pulled out a chair. He sat himself down and ran his small fingers against his long neck. "Certainly so." Jung tugged at the collar of his blue shirt and straightened out his khakis. "You don't look so old Craven," Jung said to him. Eric smiled while running his hand through his hair, "You're still a perfectionist. Not to deter, but you do look old and so do I." Jung laughed heartily and he thought about how almost all of their conversations were strangely disjointed. "I wonder if it began when I told you that I liked you," Jung said to him after putting his mug down. Eric shrugged, "Maybe that did change things. Although I tend to see that as a different time altogether." "Because there are such drastic differences, right?" Eric looked over at Jung, carefully noting the small gray eyes. Jung always had that feminine look to him, regardless of what he did. "I hate to bring it up." Jung shrugged, "Hey, we've all got skeletons in our closets." "You have to admit it was different when you declared your feelings towards me," Eric said, shifting through some of the loose sheets. "Precisely! Because I was female then, stop avoiding that which you've meaning to say, you silly old bat." "You forgot to put sugar in here." Jung leaned back in his seat and watched Eric's reaction to the lack of sugar. Jung then reached into his pocket and presented a small packet of sugar substitute. "Oh, I see, you're trying to kill me."

Jung looked over the books, "All stuff she left you?" "Yes." "Then what the hell are you looking for?" Eric looked at Jung, "An answer." Jung began motioning with his arms, a signal to Eric so that he may continue. "Shut up." "No thanks, I'll take your sarcasm or denial, or whatever is in the bag later. Can you complete your thought? Or voice your thought?" Eric sighed and then seated himself; he sipped his tea, forgetting that he had not put sugar in it. "You are really hard to deal with. You know that right?" "Yes, I'm despicable. I am the worse friend, ever. I'm also the best doctor, ever." Eric laughed and told him why he was searching for an answer while Jung listened carefully.

Jung looked down at the books once again, "May I flip through?" Eric nodded in approval. Jung picked up the first book and opened the book at a random page. In careful letters along the top, with distinct and deliberate flourish was the title, "The Art of Being Yours." There was a close up picture of Eric and Shauna together. Jung held the book out a little to examine the dried flowers. There were little golden speckles and probably a bit of ink splatter around it. Jung ran his finger along the bottom of the picture to see if it were secure. It was not, so he lifted the picture. He exhaled at the sight of the small piece that was there. Looking up at Eric, who was focusing on something else, "How will you find your answer?" "This might sound bad, but I think that Shauna left me an answer to the problem. When she got together to plan things with Talen, they didn't leave anything left undone. All possible alternatives were examined and I'm sure that this question I was presented with was a big one on their list. She might not have given an answer, but I'm sure she'd offer guidance." Jung looked at him, "Sounds reasonable. Talen served as her guardian and brother for many years, it would only be right that they planned for this." Jung looked back down at the writing, "How the hell did you get her to love you so much? You are not worth this." Eric couldn't help but laugh. "This is an odd piece. Mind if I read aloud?" "This isn't first grade, you don't have to ask me."

"So then I'll breathe. The art of being alone is a lesson hard learned, but the lesson of being yours is a blessing and something much worse. Being yours is learning everything that is you, every book, musical piece, television show, and every other odd thing in and out. It's about knowing how you breathe, how you sing, how you get angry and how to attain inner peace. It's finding the right things to make you smile and the right things to make you happy. It's also about finding the opposite lest you ever cross me. It's about reading, learning, cooking, and playing together. It's combining two lives so that we could be one and yet still be our own person. The art of being yours in finding myself in your eyes but still being me. It's about making sure that I don't hurt you and that I never betray your trust. It's

making sure that you're okay and I'm okay and that we both make it home. The art of being yours is like cultivating the perfect flower. (Oh my goodness, did I just compare our love to flower?) It's when we pick out pictures for our walls together knowing that we have to love what we see and the other has to love it too. The art of being yours is learning to appreciate pink roses, even when you buy calla lilies."

"I have to ask you, because you're so finicky. It's pretty and yet ridiculous. No wonder she wrote it to you. You'd be the only person that could appreciate it for what it's worth," Jung mused. Eric looked at him exasperatingly, "Are you serious?" "Look old man, I'm not being patronizing or idiotic. I get the reason why only you'd appreciate some of the things written, hence the title. How else do you stress "The Art of Being Yours?" Eric moved the tablature to one of Stravinsky's pieces aside. Secretly he wondered why conversations with Jung were always so strange. He did admit to himself that this one had some kind of coherence though. "There's a lot more of her writings in this book than yours," Jung commented as he closed the book and looked it over. "That was the book I used when she was alive, or at least with me. I wanted her to write in my books." Jung put the book down and picked up his mug. "I'm sorry for your loss," Jung practically whispered. Taking his glasses off to inspect them, Eric replied, "I lost her a long time ago. I was thankful then when you offered your condolences and I am thankful now. Furthermore, I've been thankful for last million times you send in the ten years that has passed."

"Wait, if you choose the positive thing --" Jung began. "Two of the alternatives seem rather positive, the third one is neutral." "Fine, geez, but if you choose alternative A, which is the usual default, then don't you get to be with her again?" Eric smiled at Jung who looked positively puzzled. "Yeah, I can be with her if I choose that. I may even get to be with her if I chose positive B, but they all require her wanting to be with me." "And you don't think she would want to be?" "I don't know," Eric said rather sullenly. Jung laughed, "Ha! Then you are a fool! Shauna loves you! I think that she would definitely want to be with you. I mean look at the lengths." "She'd do that for anyone she loves," Eric said in a low tone. "Okay fine, we all go to great lengths for those that we love. But with all things considered and that's considering a lot, I think that she'd definitely want to be with you. I mean, I know about the whole soul mate thing. I know that she "belongs" to her other half, but what about love? From what I know, Azrael and Adam are two halves of a whole, but they don't have to be together. Same there here, huh?" I think the answer is the books themselves. I think that she left three ways of saying that she loves you." Jung paused and grabbed the other books to flip through them. The second book he grabbed he opened it to a page with the picture of the children and the third, he flipped to a picture of Eric and Talen and turned them to Eric. Confidently Jung continued, "That's your answer! There are three reasons, aside from your wife, which makes four, for you to choose A!"

"Think back to many years ago, when she first wrote this, is the art of being yours just about her?" Eric leaned back in his chair to harvest that memory.

She tied her hair up with a roll of gauze, perhaps because it was the only thing she could find. We had set up a small room so that she and I could paint, if we ever needed to. I had work that day and she was on vacation. She was biting down on a pencil and her hair was held back. She didn't even bother to put the lights on. I looked on the floor and there was an empty cup. I wondered how long she was standing there trying to figure out what was wrong. I was going to knock, but she left the door open. She didn't even notice that I walked in, so I stood by the doorway watching her. The paints were surrounding her, almost as if hoping that they would be used in her painting. She had paintbrush in her hand that she kept twirling around. The one vital thing missing was the jar of clean water she usually kept around (she tend to have several at a time), so I knew right away she hadn't painted a thing. Sure the rags were

there, but the vital tool that kept her brushes clean was missing. I leaned against the doorway and then cleared my throat, in hopes to her attention. She quickly snapped out of it when she heard that, dropping the pencil and paintbrush. She looked over at me and had a huge grin on her face. "How was your day?" she asked. She stood there and I realized she couldn't figure out if she wanted to walk or run to me. Then it dawned on me that I had a book under my arm, that's what was holding her back. I put book on the small stand near the door and walked to her. She grinned when she saw me making my way towards her and leaped into my arms. I played with her hair a bit, which smelled like jasmynes. "Gauze?" She chuckled, "Sorry. I walked in to find some watercolours, but then I caught sight of your painting. I had a vision of what I wanted to paint then, but it just won't work. It's like the painting in my head doesn't want to make contact with the paper." I smiled and kissed her softly. Her arms wrapped around me and I suddenly regretted wearing a black turtleneck. She was so warm. "You know for someone who hates painting, you do a lovely job." I could feel myself warming up quite fast and my heart sped along. I could never figure out why I acted this way around her. We had been married for a long time prior to this moment; we had even been friends long before this as well. This was different, every day with her was practically new and I felt like a child. She led me over to my painting and looked over it inquisitively. "It's beautiful," she murmured. I felt the butterflies in my stomach soar. She reached out for my hands and then brought herself closer to me. Slowly she kissed me on the lips and then held me tight. "Risan broke another vase today." "Great, because we're only buying cheap vases from now on," was my response.

"What did you name this piece?" she asked. "I haven't yet." "Not done?" she asked as she looked up at me. "It's a work in progress, lovie." After a few moments of silence, I told her that I'd like her to name it. Surprised, she scanned over the painting and couldn't figure out what to call it. Then I proceeded to another request, "Can you write in my journal?" "I always write in your journal, be specific." I smiled and kissed her on the forehead. "I'm aching for a satirical outlook on our romance. Write one." She looked at me puzzled and breathed heavily. "No thanks, I don't do that sort of stuff." She looked out the open doorway, as if trying to escape. "The Art of Being Yours," she said. I asked her what she meant. "That's what you can call the piece, "The Art of Being Yours." It's beautiful really," she said without ever really looking at me. She turned back to me, "Because the art of being yours is wondering what your sons are up to. It's being asked to write satire and asked to name paintings. I don't understand you at all, but I love every minute of discovering everything that is you." She wrapped me with a kiss. "I'd rather you write more about that idea come to think of it," I said as I held her hand left hand with my right. "And for goodness sake, stop using gauze to tie up your hair." She shrugged and then added, "It doesn't break my hair." She walked towards the doorway, picking up my book on the way out. "The art of being yours is being mine," she said without turning back. At that moment, I felt a small sense of insecurity, because she would never leave a conversation like that in the air. Something felt incomplete, like she was running away from. Just then though, I heard a loud crash followed by laughter and screaming. Of course, I should have known. She knew Risan was up to something and he slipped out of Nahit's sight.

Eric looked back over at Jung and smiled. "The art of being yours is about being mine, about being everything in the world. It's about just trusting this one person with everything. It's... Love," Eric trailed off. He inhaled deeply and looked into his cup. "How's your apple cider?" Jung looked at him amused then took a sip of his drink. "Much better than yours. Hey, does that mean that Shauna can taste it?" Eric laughed and dove right back into the books. After a bit of silence between the two, Eric finally said, "She hated tea without sugar."

Reflecting back, Eric thought about that day. Risan had decided that he should test gravity. At his young age, laws need not apply to try and test theories. Throughout the day, Risan would pick up

random objects, throw them in the air, just to see how fast they would fall. He could hear Nahit screaming to him about physics. As if it really mattered to Risan that at the distance of four feet, an object would fall eight feet per second. Risan cared about how many different ways an object could shatter. During this experiment, Risan selected a chess set. Eric was relieved when he found out that Shauna had switched his glass and marble set with a plastic look a like.

What's yours is mine and what's mine is yours.

When We're Alone

CHAPTER NINE

Sunday, March 18, 2006 4:35 AM

Jung got up and grabbed both their cups. He looked over at Eric with a sense of sympathy. Once again Eric was lost with a gaze of sheer sadness. Jung wondered if that was what love was really about. He slowly walked towards the kitchen and reflected over his own life. Along the way, he watched his reflection pass over the glass of the picture frames hung the wall. They were mostly of him and his beloved Brennon. They never married; they just lived together in a happy solitude. He considered himself tremendously fortuitous to find someone that could love him for all the complexities or lack of. Neither he nor Brennon ever dressed as females, nor did they have a reason to. Yet within their relationship, Jung felt himself the female to his significant other.

Both Brennon and himself were born females that later on realized that they were really male. The transition for Brennon (who was named Breahna) was rather simple. After being turned away or rather disowned by his grandfather, he just left. Flew to another side of the world and cultivated a new life. In Brennon's wake, he left behind his younger siblings, or at least what was left of them. Brennon had two younger sisters and one younger brother. The youngest, Saturnalia, killed herself and shortly after was when Brennon revealed his intent to the family. If one could pinpoint what went wrong in Brennon's family, one could say that it was Saturnalia's death. Whatever the case, the three children after seemed to disappoint their grandfather continually. Sadly though, their parents were accepting, but it wasn't their approval that the children sought. Before the change, Brennon expressed some kind of feelings towards Jung, but never anything to make much of. Furthermore, Jung hadn't undergone his own change. They were both females at the time.

Jung smiled softly as he thought back to those times. His transition was harder, only because at that point he was a doctor, seeing patients. Most of his patients took the change from "Jouni" to "Jung" rather easily. Perhaps the adjustment was made easier because the other doctors he worked with were present. Had it not been for Eric Craven, Talen, and Handel, it might have been much worse. He did undergo the usual fatigue from people, but not his parents as since they were emotionally absent at that point. Everything Jung had done up to that point was of his own will.

It was on a visit to the American States that brought about the meeting between himself and Brennon. Fortune smiled in their favour, as Brennon had chosen that specific time to return. Jung convinced himself that there was no way Brennon could have known that he was in the States at that time, when considering that Brennon dropped all ties six years prior. Brennon, though he loved his family, didn't reach out for anything. Upon Brennon's return he found his younger sister and brother in the same positions he expected them to be. What he found to his surprise was Jung, just as Jung found him as surprise. Jung recalled the smell of the yellow and peach roses that Brennon presented him with. Standing there looking at the pictures, he squinted at the reflection. Jung and Brennon were now both old, just as Eric Craven was. Yet they clung to loves that always brought up memories of the past.

That's what love is.

Jung walked into the kitchen, heading straight for the refrigerator. He scanned the shelves and when he finally found what he was looking for he pulled it out a new container of the apple cider. He poured some in a pan and let it simmer over the heat. He looked over at the window to his left and walked slowly over it. After lifting up the window, he reached into his pockets and pulled out a pack of cigarettes. It was a bad habit, he of all should know better. Brennon continually fought with him to abandon such a habit, but it was a routine. For the first time since Eric's arrival, he wondered where Brennon was. "I wonder if I still have a crush on you Eric Craven," Jung muttered as he fished in his pockets for the lighter. Discouraged at not being able to find his lighter, he put the cigarette down on the table along with the pack and looked into the pan. He reached out for the cinnamon and nutmeg. Before throwing them in, he stopped and realized that Eric may not enjoy such ingredients in the cider. He turned down the heat and then went over to the sink to wash the mugs. He unbuttoned the sleeves and carefully rolled them up. He watched the soap bubbles, the trickle of the water, and kept in mind the cider. "How damn trivial this all is," he muttered to himself. Finally content with the cleanliness of the mugs, he dried them and put them down. Walking over to the cabinet he began to roll down his sleeves. He selected the bottle of maple of syrup then decided to pour that into one of mugs. In the other he put the nutmeg and cinnamon, then poured the cider evenly into both cups.

Jung walked swiftly back into the dining room where Eric had resumed his stature and was inspecting the painting on the wall. When Eric heard him, he said into the picture, "Monet." "You're good." "Not really, everyone knows what a Monet looks like." "Monet replica," Jung corrected. Eric looked at him with a smirk, "Monet or replica of Monet, it's his vision." "Same difference." Jung handed him the mug of apple cider with maple syrup. "It doesn't have sugar, it has maple syrup." "How is that any better?" Jung beamed at him; "We're the black void of actual sugar. Do what you will." "Why this painting?" Eric questioned with a serious look. "It's peaceful and serene. Matches with the wall also works." Eric nodded, "Did you guys pick this out together?" Jung took a sip of his cider and walked over to the painting, "Nope. I saw it and knew it would match. When I brought it home, he didn't question. I think he likes it." "I know you asked him for his opinion, so why the uncertainty?" Shrugging, Jung replied without much enthused, "He could've lied. It's a painting. I don't care either way you look at it. It's just a painting and thankfully, neither of us are painters. Not much for arts, we can appreciate, just not distinguish. Now, if this were about a book or a table dining room set, then there'd be a serious discussion." He winked at Eric and went back to the seat he sat at previously. "Who picked out the dining room set?" "Joint decision, though Bren saw it first. I have a feeling you're getting ready to leave. You're not satisfied." "On the contraire, I was going to request to stay the night. With Brennon's permission and blessing, naturally," Eric said smugly. Jung bit his lower lip and stared back at Eric. Eric was somewhat tall and his white hair only matched his blonde hair well. Eric looked over at Jung wondering what he could possibly say that would get Jung to stop biting his lip. He didn't anticipate this sort of reaction. "What's wrong?" "Nothing, I'll put you up for a night or however long you need. Brennon won't mind either way. Although I'd hate to see what happens to you in a house where you have two men who once adored you."

Jung escorted Eric over to the guest room. The walls were lined with beige and white panels, the ceiling and floor were beige as well. Jung headed over to the chest of drawers, pulling out the last draw. He fumbled with the sheets as he tugged them out of the drawer. Eric remained by the doorway when he said, "Jung leave it, I'll take care of. There's still light out, don't worry." Eric walked over and took the sheets away from him. He began spreading out and setting the sheets. Jung backed away and watched Eric as the sunlight embraced him. He did look lovely, Jung thought to himself. "I'll be in the

living room,” Jung said to him and then turned to leave. Jung fished his cellular phone out and dialed Brennon’s number. When he heard Brennon’s hello, he sighed deeply and sunk into the sofa. “Eric’s here and he’ll be staying the night.” Brennon laughed, “Oh really?” “He did want to ask your permission, but it’s been a while since you’ve seen him. I’m sure you’d like it if he stayed in our house.” Brennon answer came with a deep concern, “Stop worrying. I can hear it in your voice and I’m sure Eric sees it. You never could hide your feelings. I know I’m part of the Mahesa lineage, but they don’t want me there, well except for my siblings and parents. I’m sure that whatever Eric does there, he’s safest from my forsaken family. Even if they hunted the man down in order to pry his brain out of his skull, they’d stop dead at our front door. And you know why -- it’s because we’re gay transsexuals, which makes my grandfather ghost squirm. You also know that my brother, parents, my sister and her children would leave us alone till the day of doom because grandfather hated me that much.” “That doesn’t comfort me at all,” Jung said as he clutched to the phone. “Fine, is he still hot?” Jung burst into laughter, “Hey, that’s not a decent question!” “Right, but you laughed, so now you have to answer.” “It is Eric Craven, Bren. He is quite handsome.” “Yeah, yeah, look just don’t let me catch you flirting with him when I get home.”

Brennon walked into the house looking around. It was a bit after eleven and the house was quiet. Jung wouldn’t be sleeping, though after Eric’s travel, it might be plausible that he’d be asleep. He took off his brown shoes and tugged at his pants. He headed straight for the kitchen and pulled out a bottle of water and began drinking from it. He turned to the small table and found an unlit cigarette and the pack. He scoffed and shook his head, “So, you naughty thing, you’ve been up to smoking again. Well, now aren’t I reassured in removing your blasted lighter.” He picked up the carton and the cigarette then tossed them into the garbage. He headed over their room and checked inside. Not here, but he was dying to get out his clothes. He got rid of the black long sleeve shirt and the black pants, then got into a black tee shirt with a faded logo and gray sweats. Brennon picked up the brush on their chest of draws then looked into the mirror to comb his brown hair. He stared at the reflection of his dark brown eyes and instinctively brushed his hair.

Brennon walked out swiftly, letting the door close slightly. If Jung weren’t there, then he’d be in the study. Sure enough, as he got closer he saw the light along the bottom of the shut door. He held himself close the door and then rapped softly. “Enter,” was the response. Smirking, he twisted the doorknob and pushed the door. There was Jung sitting in the chair in a gray tee shirt and black sweats. “Your visitor isn’t here, he’s asleep in the guest room,” Jung said staring at Brennon. “I know, it’s late.” “I hadn’t noticed,” Jung replied smugly and dropped his eyes back to the book he held. Brennon walked over to him and lifted his chin, then kissed him softly on the lips. “How is he?” “He’s well, but not so well. I think your training knows what is coming next.” “Not really.” “Did whatever you had to do get done?” “I was meeting with my nephew, for your information.” “Which?” Brennon tighten his lips and sat down on the chair beside Jung. Brennon looked over at Jung, who was still not looking at him, so he put his hand in the book. “Rishi, and he’s well, thanks for asking.” “You’re speaking to the current head of the Mahesa line? Just great.” “He’s having women issues, which I think he thought it would be better to speak to an elder. Although, it’s sad that he thinks I’m the best to speak to.” Jung smiled a little before looking over at Brennon. “You are part of one fucked up family,” Jung said mirthlessly. “You’re right,” Brennon began as he leaned back, “the kid’s mother is a lesbian and his other uncle is completely inept at holding down a relationship. Actually his mother’s the same also. I’m the normal thing he has and I lack that societal norm.” “Human society?” Brennon looked at him; “Sweats do not suit you at all. I’m going to speak to Eric.” Brennon got up and headed towards the door. “Leave him alone, he’s tired as is.” Brennon paused to turn towards him, “Fine, then accompany me.”

Brennon and Jung walked to the guest room together, holding hands. “Is Rishi alright otherwise?”

"Yes." "And of Ricky?" "Ricky is fine as well." Brennon reached out to the door and opened it. "You should knock." Brennon smiled and drew Jung closer to him. He kissed his forehead and then let himself into the room. Brennon saw the silhouette of Eric's sleeping figure. He kneeled beside the bed and nudged him. Eric turned over and stared at Brennon. "Good to see you. Nice you know you always lack manners," Eric whispered. "Manners are for the weak," Brennon responded happily. Jung walked in and apologized for Brennon. "Neither of you have any reason to apologize." Brennon looked over at Jung, "Could you leave us?" Jung nodded and then left. Brennon got up and after Eric rolled over a bit, sat on the bed. "It is unbecoming of a gentleman of your stature to receive guests at this hour. Especially not so in your room," Brennon said to him playfully. "You were gone for a long time, I think it unsettles Jung." Brennon looked up at the ceiling; "I went to see Rishi. You know how it worries him." "How's he doing?" "He's alright. Though he thinks I'm normal. To think, me, normal. If you would have asked me if my nephew would ever come to think of me as normal, I'd call you crazy on the spot. Now look, I'm the only normal one." Eric smiled but Brennon didn't see it through the dark. Brennon reached over and put on the lamp that was beside the bed. "That's better." "You said you weren't normal?" Brennon shrugged as he stared at the wall. He looked over at Eric and asked, "Do you mind?" Eric shook his head, so Brennon laid down beside him. "You never saw anything wrong?"

Brennon and Eric laid side by side staring up at the ceiling. "You're a good man that's done little, if any, wrong. I can't say that I saw anything wrong," Eric replied. "Jung was afraid that my family would come looking for you here. They are so intent in knowing about your experiences. They're jerks and they've accustomed their lives to that." Eric glanced over at him and then returned his glare to the ceiling, "No wonder he was acting strange." "The ceiling, it's about the length as the wedding picture, right?" "Is yours like that?" "I didn't get married, so I never received one," Brennon answered carefully. "Tell me about yours." "It's a simple piece with the four seasons." Brennon looked over at him; "You're not seriously going to leave out every detail, are you?" Eric laughed, "What did you come here for?" Brennon poked him and then stared at the ceiling. "I guess I missed you. You're like family to me."

The Beige Ceiling of Regret

CHAPTER TEN

Saturday, March 18, 2006 7:15:33 PM

Eric rolled over with his back towards Brennon. "I never had a crush on you," Brennon said. Eric pulled the sheet over his mouth and chuckled. Hearing his chuckles, Brennon poked his back. "I heard that." Eric pushed the sheet and turned towards him. "You liked Shaun," Eric said with a wink. Brennon turned to face him, "Yeah, I suppose I did. I was always confused about everything." Eric shrugged and poked him on his arm, "So? I heard that's what made all your childhood experiences fun." "I remember Shauna." Eric stiffened up a bit, "I'd expect you to remember her. You are nine years older than her and a year younger than Talen. You are the co-leader of the pack, even if rejected." Eric bit his lower lip, "I'm sorry, that shouldn't have been..." Brennon laughed, "It wasn't; stop being so sensitive. Yeah, even after I left, I was still one of the people they looked up to. When I returned, they quickly accepted me back into the system. I figured they'd be angry that I left, but it wasn't like that with them." Brennon glanced up to the ceiling, "If I would have known then what I knew now, I wouldn't have left." "Then our state of affairs might have been much worse," Eric commented. "Think about it, if you would never have left, then Jade would still have been disowned. Jace would step up to take your place in the family and might have settled down and have children. Then Rishi wouldn't be the current go-to person for everything. He might have even been a scientist or professor somewhere. Ricky would still have chosen to be a photographer, though he might not have concentrated so hard. You might have never been with Jung." Brennon laughed at Eric's alternative to this current life. "Or maybe, I'd still be

Breahna but I'd be with a Jouni," Brennon added.

"How is married life?" Eric asked. "I should be asking you that," Brennon returned. "It's pretty good, Jung is wonderful. We barely get into argument, although when we do, they are ferocious and usually over something damn stupid. Like the placement of a chair or the colour of the ceiling. Otherwise, we get along fine. What was it like for you?" Eric tucked his hair behind his ear, "It was pretty good. Slightly unexpected because she was so fragile about everything. Just had a way of dropping conversations to save something else. It was a tug of war and left me feeling powerful and unnecessary all at the same time." "At least she got you into poetics. You could have just set we had our ups and downs." Eric laughed slightly, "We did, but never any major fights. We got along and agreed with almost everything. She'd let me plan her entire world, which was great. I always had to keep in mind that she owned my life, so planning hers was nothing." "Makes sense. I wonder if Teri ever felt the same way." Eric pondered on that for a moment before returning an answer. "I think it's slightly different for her. Teri married an angel and created a sahjina, which by angelic law, means that she is to become an angel. Acceptance is simpler when you have that." "I knew that," Brennon said confidently, "but angelic law states that if you mate with an angel ever, you are to become one yourself. Keeps the species clean." Eric stared back at him, "You never got a painting?"

Brennon breathed in heavily, "We did. Traditions around here are strange. Grandfather would never allow something like that. He'd never recognize a gay marriage so he'd never seek for a painting to be done. We didn't even pursue getting married; it just didn't seem necessary. Sometime after we got this house, a mailing tube arrived from New York. It was addressed to both of us, so I figured I'd wait till Jung got home so we could both open it. Jung is strangely sentimental about us opening mail that's addressed to us both. Although, if it's junk mail, he'd really rather not see it. He got home and I presented the tube. We just sat down in front of the television and opened it. I watched him pull out the sheet or whatever it is and I looked at in awe. I knew what it was he didn't though. A small index card fell out with the typed words, 'May you live a happy life together. With all the love and compassion in the world.' Jung began unrolling it slowly, but I knew that could take forever. I asked him if I could hold it and I sort of just rolled it out by holding one end and throwing the rest out. Naturally it was huge, and took up the whole span of the room. After we set it down flat, we went over to inspect what was drawn on." Eric then asked, "Whose symbols were on it?" "Jace, Jade, my two nephew's, Shauna, Shaun, and my parents. No one from Jung's side." "I would've signed it had I known," Eric offered. "In the morning."

Brennon returned to his room to find Jung already asleep. He sat on his side and listened to the quiet of the house. As quietly as he could, he got up to leave the room. He walked down to the study and pulled the book with the green and black spine. It was quite large but still very light. He took it over to the seat and sat down with it. Gently lifting the cover, he tried to avoid the dust that came off. Inside the hollow book was the painting that was sent to them. He ran his fingers over the thin bamboo that was put outside of the canvas. On the other side was the painting itself. These things were very long, so most of the recipients never hung them up. They kept them safe from the world where it was between those who gave and received it. It was gift of love that only those who were loved needed to know about. The canvas smelled like oleanders, which was the staple of the original artist that created it. Usually an artist starts the piece and then it's mailed to others, so they could add bits or add their signature. He lifted it out and held it close to his chest. Almost as if rediscovering once again, that he used to be female, he put the painting back into the hollow book and placed it on the floor. He slowly lifted his shirt and ran his fingers along the scars of where his breasts used to be. He had lost his breast to breast cancer so many years ago. The scars remain and a reminder that his departure from home and his family wasn't just because his grandfather denied him. It was because when he discovered he ad

cancer, he didn't want anyone to know. Most still don't know. He told Jung and many years later he finally told Jade, which brought her to tears. It was the first time since she was nine had he seen her cry. He pulled his shirt down and then reached down to the book. Gathering it up he put it back in its place and walked out of the room. "If I ever regretted anything in my entire life, it was not marrying you Jung," he said to himself. He returned to his room and laid himself down next to a sleeping Jung. "I'm right where I belong," he whispered to Jung and let the sleep over come him.

"What do you remember about the day you first saw the painting? What did you feel?"

Brennon stood over the painting massively impressed with it. Jung looked at him questioningly. "This is a wedding gift from our friends and family," Brennon said happily. "We're not married though," Jung said with a smirk. "They consider us married. To be married doesn't mean you've to have documentation. Just have to feel it," Brennon said with a wink. "What is it? It's pretty, but I have no idea what it is about." Brennon pulled him over, "This very long picture is divided into four parts. It's supposed to show how we can survive the four seasons together." He pulled him to the far left and began explaining each frame.

"What about you Eric?"

The tube came in the mail months before our wedding. The tube was marked, "Sir and Lady Raganavok," which I thought was interesting. I had some matters to tend to, so I put the tube aside till I was ready. While on my way out, I grabbed the tube and went to go meet Shauna. I remember walking into the room and watching her figure. She stood aggressively, staring into the screen. She was dictating work to some of her employees in another building in another location. She wore her hair out and it was long, reaching far down her back. I knew she had on a white oxford shirt underneath the black sweater. I didn't need to see the collar to know that. The black sweater had the Tannen crest and I also knew that the black tie she had on had a small Tannen crest as well. The black pants were sort of flared. She looked so dominant as she concentrated on her work. Of course, I also knew that she wasn't that serious, because she was speaking to Osias. I was familiar with Osias. He was a dedicated worker that only took direct orders from Shauna or Talen. Osias was slightly pretentious and had a way with getting away with everything. While the other worker, Greg, was dancing on the desks, Osias was listening to classical music while viewing pornographic material. She wasn't worried about them getting their work done; they always strove to outdo themselves weekly. She was more engaged in finding out what was wrong with Osias' personal life (since it was obvious that something was bothering him). I listened outside in the hall and tried to avoid remembering what was happening throughout the conversation. I just listened enough to know when the conversation was done. When it was I entered the room to find her grinning at me. "Thanks for waiting hun," she said. She walked up to me and threw her arms around me.

After I hugged and kissed her, I showed her the tube. I pulled up a chair and offered it to her, but she refused. I seated myself and pulled her down into my lap. I watched as she opened the tube and pull out the canvas. As she pulled it out, a small index card fell out. She got up to pick it up and then returned to my lap. The small words, "May your wedding be blessed by the other three elements," were printed across it. She then rolled the painting out across the room. Together we got up and looked down at the painting. We sat down on the floor and carefully examined each "frame." Each frame is painted to represent a distance; it's the details you have to examine. The first frame was the season of spring. Set in the middle of the green and pink valley, below the red sun, a small stream of blue coursed through. In this spring frame, there were cherry blossoms and below one of the trees, there was Shauna, holding a small pink flower and I holding her other hand. Together our figures looked down at the flower as her

hair whipped around us. The overall spring frame had a colour of blue to it. The next frame was summer and it had an overall tone of red. This setting was the same except that there was no stream and the sun was set higher and much deeper in colour. There were no longer any cherry blossoms, just maple trees. There was now a small house on the right. This summer frame had moved our figures to the house, where we stood with one another, gazing out into the distance. The third frame was of fall and had an overall tone of brown. The land had toned down in greens and there was more clarity in the picture. The small stream returned and some of the leaves left. The house vanished as well and our figures were beneath a tree. The last frame was of winter with the overall colour of blue. The house returned and the maple trees became pine trees (how convenient). The land had snow and it had us dancing in falling snow.

How did it feel to receive our first wedding blessing? Interesting. After Shauna rolled it up and placed it back into the tube, I finally found the way to tell her what I needed to. I told her that I had bought her wedding dress. She looked positively upset with me. I smiled and pulled out the small envelope from my pants pocket. It was a letter from one of the wedding dress designers that she adored. I told her to get ready since we're going out for sushi and left the room. After I left, I could only feel pleased with my arrogance. If I stayed there, she would have leapt into my arms and try to convince me that she was undeserving. In this way, she can handle the news herself and I could get our coats. I didn't hear her scream or say anything in joy, which meant she was truly happy and ecstatic over it. I tried to picture what it was like to read a letter from your favourite designer to your beloved, and what it was like to receive an invitation to come up and work on the dress together.

When we married, we moved to my home in Australia. Shauna made a box to store the painting in and we kept that in a small safe in our closet. The tale I hear is that no one who has ever received a painting has ever hung it up.

"You're correct," Brennon said as he waved a pretzel at Eric. The three men were all seated at the table for breakfast. Jung smiled as he lifted the fork into his mouth. "What's the point then?" Eric and Brennon shot him a look and Brennon answered casually, "It's good luck." Brennon turned to Eric, "Who signed yours?" Eric drew up a visual of the painting before answering. "They were clever about it; they drew in small wasps, fireflies, hornets, and butterflies all over. Actual signatures included Talen, Silen, Vincze, Chris, Jace, Mariel, Vani, and Sharlene." Brennon looked over at him confused, "What's the deal with the insects." Jung cleared his throat, "The wasp is Eric, the hornet is Talen, the firefly is Shauna, and the butterfly is Silen. It's a family thing." Brennon shrugged and continued eating his food. "Oh that reminds me. Why did we paint the guest room beige? It's far too boring." Jung laughed and put down his fork. "We painted it beige because you didn't like blue and I didn't like pink." "So we chose beige?" "Neither of us goes in there to sleep, so it just never occurred that we might not actually like the colour." Eric watched the ongoing conversation between the two. He kept quiet and pushed around the eggs on his plate. "I like beige," he offered. "There you have it. Fin," Jung declared.

"If I ever regret anything, then I'd be a fool," Jung said to them unexpectedly. Eric smiled, "I regret not being with her sooner, perhaps then we'd have more time together. No, actually that was timed perfectly. I regret not disciplining Risan more." "Christ, everyone regrets that you didn't discipline that kid more. He openly defies every humanistic law possible," Jung remarked. Brennon looked at them both and shrugged, "He doesn't have to listen to human laws. Although sometimes I did wish that he was less extravagant. It would be nicer sometimes. So after you sign our painting, what have you planned next?" "We'll see where Destiny takes me." "We are always where we need to be, right?"

"Risan is the kind of kid that would climb the highest mountain then sit on top lecturing it about how it

has no reason to be that large.”

After breakfast, Brennon and Eric walked over to the study. Brennon retrieved the book that contained the painting and rolled it for Eric to see. The first scene was of winter, with the figure of Brennon leading Jung along a path of snow. The spring frame had the two lying down in a field, taking in the sun amongst the orange and yellow flowers. The summer frame had them leaning over the banister near their house, looking down at the valley. The final frame of fall had them playing with some birds down in the valley. Eric inspected the light signatures, which meant that much time had elapsed. All signatures are pressed into the bamboo under the canvas and then lightly brushed over. Brennon handed him a small bottle of ink along with a fountain pen and then lifted a portion of the painting. “Where would you like to sign?” “The summer frame,” he answered with a grin. Brennon shifted over to the summer frame and Eric dipped the pen and looked over the picture carefully. In one of the trees, he drew in a small bird and in another he wrote his initials in the form of another small bird. He dipped the pen again and drew in a wasp.

“What happens to these paintings if we all die?” Brennon wondered. “I guess they get passed on to our children or family members.” Brennon laughed, “Or maybe the information collectors steal them and archive them. I wonder what they’ll think when they study this a hundred years from now.” “They’ll think we were a strange set of people,” Eric said simply. “Maybe you should join me today. I have to meet with my nephew again,” Brennon offered. “Maybe I need to be alone,” Eric answered softly. “I think you’ve had enough time being alone. Call Talen, or your children. Just don’t stay alone.”

I regret giving you all of me. Especially when I knew that I couldn’t have all of you. The ceiling in this room was dark brown with specks of gold. Definitely Jung’s work, he was always particular of his work area.

Drowning in Your Sorrow

CHAPTER ELEVEN

Sunday, March 19, 2006 1:20:00 AM

Eric found himself seated once again at the dining room table with his books. He decided to replicate the pattern he noticed on the ceiling of Jung’s study in his books. “I don’t want to be haunted by your ghost,” he muttered and he tried to steady his hand. He remembered the days that his mother prided over his meticulous work. He remembered the days he did the very same and even when his wife did the same thing. The painting that she named, “The Art of Being Yours,” he sold some time after her death. He didn’t want to, but something seemed foolish in keeping it around. It wasn’t anything spectacular, but she had made such a big deal. She framed in a beautifully carved and painted frame. “What was that painting about?” he asked as he paused. He tried to drum up the memory of the painting, but could barely remember what colours were in it. It was barely afternoon as yet, as he found himself clutching his head, as if he could pull the memory out of himself.

Beside himself, he warily got up and headed towards the kitchen. After pouring himself a glass of water, he headed towards the guest room. He grabbed his bag and then sat down on the bed with it. He placed his glass on the small table that held the lamp and begun searching for the pill bottle in his bag. Upon finding it, he dropped the bag on the floor and then drank a pill. He laid himself down and felt his vision getting hopelessly hazy. Finally asleep, he drifted into a dream that he could barely make out.

A young girl stepped out of the shadow and looked over the sleeping figure. She lay beside him and then buried her head in his chest. Eric drifted out of his sleep to find her. “You can let go now,” she

whispered. His eyes swelled up to see the gray-eyed girl beside him. He brought his hand up to her and held her close. "Is that what you really look like?" He closed his eyes and then opened it to find the person he knew in a form he was familiar with. "You make adjusting to a new cycle really hard," she said. "Does it bother you that I wanted to grow old with you?" he answered. "Oh you're being brave again, huh?" She moved herself on top of him and listened to his heartbeat. He took a deep breath before asking her the question that was always on his mind, "Did I make you happy?" "Yes," she answered without hesitation. She jolted up to look him in the face. "Then why did you kill yourself?" Taken aback, her eye furrowed at the very question. "Kill myself? I guess that's what you saw. I didn't kill myself." "I was there, holding you for goodness sake as you laid there dying. How could you tell me you didn't?" She bit down on her lip and then placed her ear over his heart again. "I know you know that Jibril and I are connected." He sighed and wrapped his arms around her. "He died, so you had to die. It was the balance. Why didn't any one say that?" "We thought you saw it that way. Apparently the way I died was perceived differently by each onlooker." Eric shifted her body up so that he could see her face, "How did he die? I doubt he'd kill himself. He liked being Chris." She looked into Eric's blue eyes and kissed his lips, "He was strangled by chance. He should have been more careful and the death gatherers were already prepared for him." Eric looked into her dark brown eyes, "And you? They were prepared for you?" "When they prepare for one of us, they automatically must prepare for the other." "No warning? There had to have been." She smiled, "There was, for him. They just forgot to tell me." "You were stolen from me," he said as he held her. She fell back into his arms and lay on his chest. "How many past lovers or spouses have you visited?" She laughed and kissed him on the cheek, "You'd be the first." "Did I age well?" He asked with a smile, "Yep." "I have to confess, my dear Firefly, I cannot recall what the painting 'The Art of Being Yours' looks like." She grabbed his left hand and kissed it, "You don't paint or draw as much. You don't perform surgery because your hands aren't steady. Now all you do is teach. You want to remember what your painting was like? Then you should have never sold it. It reminded me of something like a cross between Matisse and Seurat. Maybe that's my own bias. It would have been plain, but it was a cliff over the ocean. When I looked at it, I remember thinking, 'Why does that cliff want to be part of the ocean so much?' It struck me that it wanted to return to where it rose. We all want to return to where we came from. One way or the other."

"Do you want to return to me?"

Eric shot up straight wondering if that was a dream or was it real. It most certainly could have been true. He always hated waking up like this. He checked his wristwatch to find that he'd been asleep for the last two hours. No trace of her or anything that would give evidence to it being true. He half expected to find a note from her or to see her walk in. He decided that he would go refresh himself and then return to the books. While in the bathroom, a part of him secretly hoped that she left something in the books if she was there. She always left something for him, in death or in life. It was her way of saying that she loved him. Often Talen would return with something that would be convincing of some sort of love. Yet he felt like he meant nothing to such a being. How does one human being come to mean something to a billion year old angelic being? It was a question he often asked himself because not only did he have to ponder on the love between Shauna and himself, but the one shared between him and Talen, or even Silen. Those were three people whom he loved and invested in and had a return of such feeling throughout this lifetime. But for each of them, this life span was coming to an end. He, Eric, would return to the pool of souls, to be recycled. Would he mean anything to these three beings? How many people came before him that they fell in love with and easily fell out of love with? He wiped his face with the towel and then threw it at the mirror. He hated this ridiculous turmoil he felt. He grinded his teeth and then picked up the towel to hang it up. Life wasn't fair, but neither was Death. Speaking of which, Time, although loved, wasn't very time along with Destiny.

But he loved them all for the over dramatic people they all were.

He walked back to the dining room to find his books exactly as he had left them. No movement. "She wasn't here after all," he muttered to himself. "That's fine." He seated himself down and began rummaging through the books. He heard someone rustling in the hallway, so called out, "No Brennon, I haven't left. And if you're not Brennon, then yes Jung, I'm still here." The dark figure walked in with two cups in hand. Eric looked up at the figure and realized whom it was. "I honestly was going to leave you some hidden message. Like a note in your eyeglass case or in your books. I even thought about putting one in your pockets or in your pen. But I figure that you had enough of the lack of clarity in this life." She had long dark brown hair that was left flowing and wore a black long sleeve shirt with black pants. He could see the dark brown eyes behind the glasses. "There was a part of me that really expected you," he said. She handed him a cup and then sat down across from him. She took a sip from the cup and then returned her gaze to him. "There was also a part of you that was afraid that I wouldn't be here," she said to him nonchalantly. "What's your name in this new life of yours?" "As the child? Monserrat." "That's beautiful." She smiled at him, "I've a lot of names, but do you know which are my favourites?" He leaned back with a smile, "Pet names. Like Firefly, Zan, Tenah, and so forth." She grinned back at him, "Correct."

She looked over the books; "You kept them in such good shape." He smiled at her and replied, "You made them strong." "What are you looking for?" She looked at him with a soft glare. "An answer to finding you," he answered. "But I'm trying to figure out if you'll have me," he added. She broke into a grin, "You're one of us. Whether you like it or not. Talen loves you and so do I. If you decide that you'll have nothing to do with us, then so be it. Will take your memories if you'd like, or your knowledge, and will send you back into the pool where you can continue life as ordinary as any other human. You can deny the existence of us and anything else. But we'll mourn you as we watch over you. I wonder who you'll hurt the most." She took a sip of her tea and then added quietly, "I never meant to hurt you." "Neither of you hurt me. You just stole the old world away from me. You both put me in a position where I thought I could control and love things that were just showing mercy." "Then we'll take it away, if that's what you'd like," she whispered. "I cannot understand how I can love something that will forever own me. Had I been anyone else, you wouldn't give me a choice. You'd do what needs to be done and go on your way," he said angrily. She didn't know how to mend this rupture between them. "I shouldn't have come or stayed, I'm sorry." She got up with tears in her eyes and picked up her cup. "I wanted to return to you, but I can't in this life span." "Shauna, I want to return to you, but what is it worth if I change and I can never return to you again?" "Then you'll spread your wings and begin anew, my love." "Then whom would I belong to?" She stared at the doorway and then looked over her shoulder only to reply, "You'd belong to no one. You'd be marked by Talen and myself, but you'd be your own."

She walked over to him and put her arms around him. "I remember you singing to me once," she whispered softly into his ear. "I don't know what to say to make you feel better. I'm here and I'm trying. Yet I lack that quality that makes you feel at ease. Yes, if you had been anyone else, we needn't bother with your opinion. But you have loved and been loved by two of us. You have gained the respect and admiration of the other two. How many even get passed two? Rare. Others win the decision by law, yet you've won it by love. When I died, I ached for you. I wanted to be returned, but life had already begun again. Sure, I could have pulled out of the human species and been with you, but then what would have happened if you died also? That's not the only reason. You know that when we choose to live as humans, there is always an elder. In this life, Azrael and Adam served as elders. In this new one, Jibril and I are the elders. Soon Adam and Azrael will be born again into the world and they'll need to find their solace in us." Eric shook his head, "Shut up." She kissed the back of his neck, "I missed you

doing that when I rambled also.” “You really did miss me?” She hugged him tightly and bit his ear softly, “Duh.” She loosened her hold on him and turned his face towards her. “I better be getting back,” she said with a smile. She kissed him on the lips and held him close.

She turned to leave but he reached out and grabbed her hand. “One last thing,” he began. She looked down at him with a smile. “Did you ever regret anything?” She twitched and began fidgeting with her hands, “I regret that I didn’t take away all your fears. Or at least make you comfortable in our relationship.” He nodded, “Anything else?” She smiled wryly at him, “I regret that even though I gave you whatever I could of everything that was me, that I didn’t let you know.” “You really think you gave me everything of you, well of what you could,” he answered with a brow raised. “Yes.” A silence between the two ensued until finally she said, “In what way did you not have me? Or what do you think was lacking?” He thought on that and reflected on their lives together. “I didn’t have your faith in yourself.” She blinked a few times trying to decipher what he said. “I had faith in things around me, that’s what mattered.” “I had your complete love then?” “Kind of. You had to share it with the kids,” she winked at him. “You are a great father and the most wonderful husband. I should have told you that more often.” He shrugged, “You did. I just didn’t listen.” “It’s easy to take something you love for granted. I’m so happy you never did that.” She kneeled before him, “I’m going to need you because I want to.” She looked over the books and then stood up and hungrily kissed him. “Don’t be afraid of your memoirs and your decision. I love you.”

He watched Shauna walk out the door. She didn’t need to do that, but did it anyway. Something symbolic in her own way. He looked at the books and chuckled. It was foolish to be searching for an answer or a reason. He picked up the pen and wrote in the first book, “As of this moment, I think I could love your mother for an eternity. I don’t know how true that is, but I’d like to try. I wish you could have seen the way she curls up when she’s cold, the way she counts heartbeats, or the way she makes me feel. I wish you could see the way she is, when she’s human, and not just a creator.” He paused and then scribbled quickly, “No matter who you are, you want to be loved.” If only Nahit would learn that lesson.

When Destiny Destroys Choice

CHAPTER TWELVE

Sunday, March 19, 2006 4:12AM

Eric stacked his book before leaving for his walk. Before leaving the house, he picked up his cellular phone and stared at it for a while. His fingers ran over the dial pad quickly as he held it up to his face. Finally he pressed a few numbers and put it up to his ear. He waited anxiously for an answer and when it came, relief spread throughout his psyche. “Hello,” was the calm young male voice. “Hi,” Eric said. He walked outside, pulling the door shut behind him. “I’m sorry to bother you,” Eric continued with uncertainty. “Bother me? Come on dad, you should know better. Do you need me there?” Eric felt himself gain a stepping in the world, he was more positive of himself and everything. “No, I just needed to hear you.” “You’re such a sentimentalist. You’re in Arizona, over at Jung’s, right?” Eric told him that he was correct and continued along his way. “I’ll join you shortly. I know you’re out for a walk.” “I don’t mean to pull you away from your work.” “It’s not that serious. Just do me a favour and don’t let it look obvious.” He listened to his oldest son hang up the phone while smiled to himself.

Eric looked at the distance he had to walk to get to where he should be to meet Nahit. After realizing that that was much too much of a walk, he called the car service. To the small ice cream shop, he would go to meet his son. As he entered, he felt the rush of cool air. He ordered a small cup of strawberry ice cream then grabbed a seat by the window. He leaned back and watched the people going and coming

throughout the complex. Finally he saw the dark haired boy he'd been waiting for. He watched Nahit, with his unkempt dark brown hair and dark brown eyes, dressed in a olive green tee shirt with blue jeans. He fumbled in, waving hello to Eric, but headed straight to the counter to order ice cream. Eric watched him as he leaned over the counter, flirting with the girl behind there. Finally she handed him two sundaes which he gratefully received then sat himself across from his father. "You're cheery today," Eric remarked. "I'm not. Wait, I forgot spoons," Nahit responded before leaving to get spoons. When he returned Eric asked, "Have you been eating properly? You're thin." Nahit tightened his lips and shoved a sundae in front of Eric along with the spoon. "Bananas, strawberry, fudge, blueberries, strawberry syrup, whipped cream, and some nuts," he said as he dove into his own. "In a good mood?" With his mouth full he responded, "It's not a good mood, it's a sugar rush."

"Your mother came to see me," Eric said taking a small bite of his own. His struck him that although Jung and Brennon did not keep sugar in the house, the tea that Shauna made for the two of them did have sugar. Now he was having sugar again and somehow before he didn't realized how much he had missed it. "I figured," Nahit said with a wink. "How so?" "She is or was happy with you." "You know about the decision I've been allowed to make then?" Nahit looked at him, "Of course I know. But I'd like you to treat me like your son and pretend that I don't know. Tell me anyway." Eric looked at him with a small smile. "Between you and your brother, I can't figure out which was worse." Nahit waved his spoon at him, "I was. Risan broke things and imitated a goblin. I was passive, but I knew what I was and am, so it had to be harder." "Why is your hair such a mess?" Nahit ran his fingers through his hair; "I usually keep tidy dad. It's just that I was in a rush." "I know, that's why something seems so strange about you today." "Something is strange about you today as well." "It's because of your mother." Nahit looked at him satisfactorily, "My creation visited me today." Eric looked slightly shocked as he leaned back. This was territory that he couldn't advise him on. Nahit scooped up more ice cream and looked out the window. "Nothing to be concerned about. She just wanted to see how her creators are doing. Caught me off guard since I was sleeping." "Is that what you were taking care of?" "Yes." "What's in your sundae?" Nahit looked down at his own sundae, "Bananas, fudge, chocolate ice cream, chocolate chips, chocolate sprinkles, whipped cream, and some nuts." Eric shook his head and continued to eat his own sundae.

"Oh you know you want to comment," Nahit challenged playfully. "I thought I saw vanilla ice cream, but that might have just been the whipped cream," Eric answered. "I'm leaving the books to you and your brother," Eric added. "The books mom made for you? Take them with you," Nahit responded. "I don't know if I want to choose those options." "You didn't explain the options yet, dad." Eric looked at him unsure of how to respond to him. Nahit wasn't playing a role of ignorance. He was playing the role of a child, because it had been so long that he was truly treated like a child. Even in his youth, there was an air to Nahit that screamed wisdom and age. Nahit commanded respect even as a child, so no one ever questioned him. Eric was probably one of the very few, possibly the first in a long time that treated him like a child, not because he had to, but because it helped Nahit understand his role.

Eric looked around the small shop. Even though there were only a few people present, he still felt uncomfortable speaking of such subjects. Nahit realized this discomfort and then said, "Then tell me the story." They'd still speak of it, but now they had the comfort of knowing that they mentioned that this was fiction. "Due to the involvement of Craven in the matters thus presented, he was given three choices of how he would continue his life. The first option is the usual one offered by law. He would become an angel and be allowed to make his own decisions in life, although under a strained relation with Time and Destiny. The second option is that he chooses to continue life cycles as human. Through that option, although he is open to the word, his memories or knowledge that was previously gained will be removed. He would have to relearn everything, but not start completely anew." Nahit followed

along listening intently while eating his sundae. “Lastly?” Nahit inquired. “Craven’s final choice is that he be completely removed. He could have the choice of being removed from existence, not by memory or knowledge, but of being. He would never have to live again.” “What did Craven choose?” Eric somewhat detached shrugged and said without much colour in his voice, “I haven’t written that part yet.”

“What was the visit like?” Nahit asked. Eric looked at his son and realized he’s already finished his sundae and was now working on the small cup of strawberry ice cream he’d purchased earlier and had not finished. “You need real food,” Eric said to him. “Talk. You seem uncomfortable.” “I’m old, leave me alone.” Nahit laughed, then quickly excused himself to go up to the counter again. This time he brought back cookies. “Seeing her again was nice. I’ve spent the last ten years trying to figure out a way of reconciling my loss and then I see her and I remember. I touched her and I felt like I was young again. I’m not saying that I’m so old, but it took me back to the days when she’d leap into my arms or lay beside me.” “You are treading a very thin line of things I want to know and don’t want to know,” Nahit pointed out as he picked out the chocolate chips from one of the cookies. “You have better table manners than that.” “I know.” “Nahit, just how much sugar have you consumed since waking up.” Nahit paused to think about this, while his hands still worked on the cookies. “Well, Aurora woke me with coffee and donuts. Then she had half a cake for me, I figured that she shared the other half with her other creator. Then we had more coffee and then cookies. Oh and pastries.” Eric reached over and snatched the cookies from him. “I don’t care how old you are, I’m telling you now, enough sugar for today.” Nahit twitched his nose at this and remained quiet. Nahit knew he was acting awfully strange with all that sugar coursing throughout him.

Nahit ran his fingers through his hair again, noting how his father wasn’t even half way done with his own sundae. “Wait, are you considering removing yourself from existence?” Nahit blurted out. “The character, I mean,” he added sheepishly. Eric looked over at his eldest and wondered what had changed in him. The sugar was creating an odd twist in his character, but to react in such a way that showed something more concerning Eric’s life? “Why did you react that way?” Eric asked. “Because it donned on me that you might actually choose to not live. It is so rare that a soul is taken out of the cycle, just erased from existence. You might actually die. And I don’t want that.” “Why not?” Nahit looked at him astounded, “I’ve been alive for quite some time. I’ve written--” Nahit realized that they stopped speaking along the lines of the story, but also noted that no one was paying attention. He reduced his voice and leaned in to continue on, “Look, as Mikhail, I’ve written legacies, healed others, done some great and bad things. As a healer, you don’t really see much souls being taken out of the mix. It happens once in every thousand or so years, but that’s rare. Souls are hard to create. I...” Nahit leaned back and inhaled deeply, noting colour schemes. “If you... If Craven ever left, I think that you’d have four people who would create something similar to you. They couldn’t create you nor would they disgrace you by bringing you back, but they would try to create something that is like you. And before you run off with your theories of which those four would definitely be, they’d include me, Risan, mom and Uten otherwise known as the Mikhail, the Sephiroth, the Lilith and the Adam.”

“It still hasn’t struck me that I am that loved by you all,” Eric said softly. “If you think you had a hard time figuring this stuff out, you’d be blown away by other’s adjustment stories. When you start off an angel, it’s pretty rough; especially when you’re young and you keep accidentally doing things. When you’re human, it’s somewhat easier in comparison, but hard either way. When Aunt Silen first became an angel, she fled to some remote place and just screamed. Only the angels heard it, but that actually hurt a lot. Uten wouldn’t go near her for days, lest he set her off again. Finally Aunt Charlotte went to go talk to her and was able to calm her down. That screaming went on for two and half months. You try waking up to the sound of a distant scream every day for two and half months. It’s easier that a human

turned angel has lesser powers though, so there are no accidents when they get angry or happy.” “Do you think that Talen will always stay with Silen?” Nahit tightened his lip and looked down at the table. Slowly he leaned forward and placed his hand under his chin. “I don’t know how to answer that in a gentle way. I know the prophecy and I know how Destiny works, so I want you to listen to everything before putting any value to it. Will Talen or Adam stay with Silen? If he could, yes. But he won’t. Not that he can help it, because he is to die by his children’s hands. That’s what sustains life here. Adam, Azrael, Jibril, and Lilith took Pharaoh into their beings and after killing Ailuros, they took her into them as well. Thus within the four of them exists the very will to live, the very essence of creation. What makes life continue on? Angelic law states that the creation will inherit the thrones when the creators are deemed unfit. But in order for life to continue, the creations must take the creators into themselves. Silen is somewhat unnecessary, so she will loose Talen to this process, when the time comes. It may take years before this ever happens, but I figure you’re speaking for long term. The same goes for Azrael; he’ll loose his beloved Charlotte when the time comes, because she’s unnecessary. They are not unnecessary in the sense of the word, but they are unnecessary for life to continue on. They’ve fulfilled their roles as either pleasing someone or bringing about the new species. Either way, life is contingent on their existence. They will continue to live, provided they can. This means that if your Craven chooses to be an angel, then he may continue to love Lilith and be with her, if she agrees. However a time will come when she will be destroyed in order for the cycle to continue on. Then he too, along with Silen and Charlotte, will loose your beloved. They don’t know that yet because their significant others never said a thing about this. They know, but how do you tell someone that has come to believe that you will always live independently, that one day you won’t?” Nahit folded his hands on the table and looked away.

“Who will be responsible for her true death?” Nahit into Eric’s blue eyes, “She technically won’t be dead. She’ll just live on in a different manner.” Eric looked unamused at this response. “Sorry dad. I know you think that means it could only be either Risan or myself, but there is also Sariel and Asura. You shouldn’t even know really.” Eric looked away remembering when he first met Sariel and Asura. “It’s Asura,” Eric said quietly. Nahit looked at him shocked. “Don’t act surprise. I did serve as your father for the last twenty-eight years and teach at the school. Of course I could deduce that Asura will slain both her and Jibril.” Nahit looked at him with sympathy, “That is was the prophecy states.” “Who created these prophecies?” “The ones governing the first set and the second set are all by the first set,” Nahit replied. “What?” “Pharaoh and Ailuros created Destiny and then within him instilled the path of what was to happen to them eventually as well as their direct creations. Basically, Pharaoh and Ailuros programmed Destiny for Pharaoh, Ailuros, Lilith, Azrael, Jibril and Adam. Now, Destiny will be recreated and programmed by Lilith, Azrael, Jibril and Adam for the next generation and the one after them.” “How’s the world going to end magic eight ball?” Nahit tilted his head to the side to think about this question. “Fire and ice, but I’d wager that fire’s got a worse temper.” “She does.”

“I remember how happy your mother was when she brought you home,” Eric said peacefully. Nahit smiled as he checked his dad’s melted ice cream. “You can’t finish that now, let’s go for a walk.” The two threw away their garbage and headed out, walking in the direction towards Jung and Brennon’s home. Nahit chuckled some while after, tucking his hands into his pants. “Mom couldn’t hide her feelings. It was clear as glass that she was happy when we got home. You know dad; I still have that airplane toy you gave me. I keep it in the box you gave it to me. Possibly the only material object I hold dear to my heart. Or the only expensive thing in my apartment.” Eric thought of several questions that he could ask Nahit. Then he realized that there’s a distance to the house. “How did you get here?” he asked. Nahit shrugged, “Mirror. You?” “Car service.” “Dad, you know how to use mirrors and you can use mirrors, why don’t you?” “Perhaps I’m being old-fashioned,” Eric answered with a wink. “Look, whatever you do, please don’t take yourself away from us,” Nahit offered as final plea. The walked the

rest of the way in silence.

“You’re a good son when you’re not miserable about something,” Eric said when they got to the door. Nahit smiled shyly and threw his arms around him. “I know how much it pains you to write your memoirs, especially since they are for an organization rather than a person, but I will request you write about something specific. Just for me, even.” Nahit eyed him suspiciously before finally saying that he’ll listen to the request. “You once loved someone or something immensely, whom you have either lost or departed from. Write about that person, for me. I want to know why it hurts you so much. Maybe there’s something similar about our misery in lost loves,” Eric asked. He kissed Nahit on the forehead and then stepped back. “You’re going to decline, but I figured I’d ask.” Nahit looked at him thoughtfully, “Many have asked me to write about it or at least speak about it. I always declined without so much as a second thought. I’ll think about it.” Nahit looked around and then looked at his father, “Ah you don’t mind if I use your mirror, do you?” Eric laughed and let the two of them into the house. Nahit stood before the first mirror that he could find. “I’ll behave and I’ll lay off the sugar. Take care of yourself dad, I love you,” he said to Eric. Before Eric could reply, his son had vanished.

On the Other Side of Being

CHAPTER THIRTEEN

Tuesday, March 21, 2006 7:51:28 PM

Eric sat down on the sofa across from the television set and watched the screen with little if any interest. He flipped through the channels looked at everything and realizing none of it matters. Every commercial seemed to reach out and drag you into it. It drowned you in a world that kept you from seeing anything else outside of it. Yes, comfort. The safety of knowing that you need the newest car out, because it made you feel better about yourself. Somewhere else there were children starving, people “dying,” angels creating plans that would eventually destroy us all. And yet, we knew nothing about that. Here it was, the proof that every person is so selfish, that they drown themselves in this world so much so that they don’t see other human beings. Forget other species, they were blind to themselves. When you pass a person on the street, what do you see? Someone so separate from yourself that’s its not worth the second glance. There they are, lost in their own world. Yet the world was full of people who did return a glance or two, who felt what you felt. Blind to them as well.

“I am guilty of it as well,” Eric muttered to himself. He sat back and watched the coloured dots of the television dance. “It’s not all bad though,” he thought to himself. “Somewhere along the lines, happiness seeps in and makes it all the more worth it. No matter how convincing the lie is.”

Do you remember when you were a part of this cycle?

When I got home that day, I was exhausted. I put my bag down on the nearest chair and continued to the living room. I could see the armchair in my field of vision when Nahit came tumbling out of the nearest doorway and grabbed hold of me. “Hi dad!” He called as he pulled me away, fumbling with his words; I was able to make out that he had something to show me. He pulled me into the kitchen, grabbed a seat and tried to make his words less jumbled. He was having a problem with an equation that he wanted my help with. He didn’t attain clarity yet when his eyes perked up as he saw Shauna behind me. I didn’t notice until I felt her arms wrap around me from behind. Nahit looked to her to see if he could continue talking, to which she said, “Go ahead, I’ve to finish up cooking.” I turned my attention towards him once again, but instead he ran off yelling that he’d ask me some other time. “One down, two more to go,” I thought to myself. I approached her without much reserve, hugging her a bit and then asking about her day. She told me the little mundane details that she knew I wouldn’t care

about. As I silently tallied up the hours and see how they worked in relation to what she said, I realized there was a chunk of time missing. She was neglecting to say something. Then I realized what was strange about this situation. She rarely, if ever cooked. Why hadn't that struck me when I first walked in? The thoughts flew as to why she wasn't telling me something and what drove her to do this. Was it something that I did? Was it something that she did? Was something going to happen? She looked over at me mysteriously and continued cooking while humming some tune she was making up as she went along. I wanted to grab her and demand that she tell me, but I knew better. She had a reason for these torturous moments.

After content with the sauce for the spaghetti, she moved it to the back and washed her hands. "I have to talk to you," she said as she dried her hands on the towel. She grabbed my hand and led me into our bedroom. I sat down on the bed, too tired to figure out what went wrong and too tired to play this game. "We've been through a lot," she started with a waver. "Yes, we have," I sat down and held my head in my hands. Too tired, too annoyed, too frustrated. I had a relatively good day, but it was still stressful. Why did she have to drag out the situation? What was she not telling me? I hated this about her; I hated how everything was a well-staged play. It couldn't have been that bad because she's still so calm. Had she done anything wrong, she'd be distraught and I'd be in control. So why?

She walked over and sat on top of me. "Hi," she murmured. I looked into her eyes and couldn't find any reassurance. "We've been through a lot and we're bound to go through much more," she continued. I held her close, trying to figure out her breathing patterns. They were swift and her body was tense. "I don't know how to tell you this but I figured that we'd work through it before telling Nahit." "You're stalling," I replied evenly. "Yes, I am. Do you think we're doing a good job with Nahit?" I dropped into the bed holding her. "You're kidding." She shook her head with a big smile, "Let's see how well this family does with another." I laughed while I felt happiness and relief. "How far along?" "Hey! I didn't even say anything yet!" She rolled over and lay beside me, facing me. "I'm pregnant." I smiled and kissed her, "Nahit is going to be so mad at you." The two of us just laid there watching one another as we reveled in our new happiness. We were already family but now we were going to have a new addition. Quietly I thought things through and I realized that the question had to be asked. "Is it ours or it is another?" She smiled briefly realizing that I might be hurt. "It's another. You've met him before though – Sephiroth." I looked over at her in my own happiness, "Doesn't matter either way. I'll admit though, it's one against three in the species category."

As we lay across from one another, staring deeply into each other's eyes, I realized that there was something that was right at that moment. It wasn't perfect, with all my knowledge I knew there was something wrong with the entire world at that moment, but right there, it was all going to be okay. Everything aside, it was perfect. My day, my patients, my work, her work, her students, her day, and our children – somehow things would work out. If it couldn't then Life couldn't have sustained itself thus far. As I lay on my side watching her, I finally pulled off my glasses and drew her clothes. In my arms, I couldn't protect her, but that's what okay. She felt warm and I just tried to remember different things that I knew. My memory flashed back to simple things, theories, ideas, thoughts (not your usual flashbacks). Nahit finally came flying in and jumped on top of me. "Okay so there's this theory thing that I can't figure out," he began. I pried him off of me, picked him up and headed out to the living room. As I walked away with him, I watched her from the corner of my eye slowly drag herself back into the kitchen to cook.

I sat down beside him and ran through the theory, which was concerning dinosaurs. I looked over the work and silently wondered why he didn't approach Shauna. She knew more about this than I did. I answered him truthfully, surprised that my answers were sufficient. After thinking them through, he sat

there content at the small table. With a deep breath, I figured he should know, lest he think that we were keeping this a secret. "How would you feel if you had a younger sibling?" I asked slowly, holding one of his small hands. He looked over at me deep in thought, "I was wondering if you'd ever tell me. I don't care either way; I like taking care of Sephi. It's going to be a boy." I wanted to look surprised or reel back, but that was pointless. The other disadvantage of being a father to an angel with infinite knowledge. Nothing can be done to surprise them.

Although they can surprise you. Nahit retreated quickly to his room. I got up and headed back over to the kitchen. I did want to straighten out his papers, but something was telling me that in his chaos was a design necessary for figuring something out. Dinosaurs meant nothing to him since he knew the theories and the facts. Maybe he was just indulging in my fatherly abilities. Shauna was just finishing up, setting up each individual plate. I got the utensils and set the table. "How was your day?" she asked. "It went over just fine. I am a little tired though." She came over with two plates, "Well then I think you'll be retiring earlier tonight," she said happily. "I know about yours, so you'll pardon me for not asking," I said to her with a grin. She smiled over her shoulder as she headed back to get the other plate of food. I followed her to get the teapot and cups. She waited on me, and then we both went over to the table together. I called for Nahit and then walked over to help her get seated. She waved me off and told me to sit down. After I sat, she came over and began massaging my shoulders. "You're spoiling me," I said under my breath as I enjoyed her hands working my neck. "I don't mind." When Nahit arrived (which was about ten minutes later), I would have been annoyed had she not been massaging me for that time. She stopped and then sat down. "You're late for someone who lives in this house," I said to him flatly. He broke into a grin and handed me an envelope. I opened it to find a handmade card, "To My Dad." I looked over the handiwork and took note that my wife had not helped him at all. This was genuinely his own work without direction. Upon opening it, I found little doodles and cutouts. Amongst it, "You're a good dad. I love you. I'll be good, I promise. Love, Nahit-Mikhail."

I looked into his eyes and I felt something I never had before. Here he was, this small child who was going to sit here for dinner. His mother, my wife, sat there quietly, and she was now pregnant. Did it matter? This child before me would sit there quietly. He'll indulge in the fantasy of a happy childhood and adulthood. Both of them will lie to me to protect me. Why? This child was no child. He was billions of years of years old, if I'm not mistaken. So was his mother. They had seen life, taken life, worked cycles that I couldn't begin to fathom. As they sat there, I was ignorant about what was going on in the other side of the world. Hell, I didn't know what going on with most of my neighbors. But as they sat there, they did. Not because they chose to, but because they had to.

Must you really take on the world?

Eric thought over the question that presented itself in his psyche. "No. No. It's all right if you're ignorant to the world. Some things simply do not concern you. So long as you put your best forward, then that should be sufficient," he said to himself. Several years ago, Shauna and her friends began a quest of introspection. Whenever one came up with a question, they'd write it on an index card and mail it to one another. Over the years, many of these index cards came in. After she died, the index cards still continued. During the time that they were together, the index cards began to be addressed to them both. Since the death, the cards were no longer addressed to "Sir and Lady Raganavok." It has now become, "Sir Raganavok," but there's always a small raven put on each envelope to symbolize the two: Our Lady and Our Sir Raganavok of the Raven Towers.

Eric returned to himself and said aloud, "I love you too Nahit." He knew he couldn't stay at Jung and Brennon's forever. He couldn't stay there even if he wanted to. At some point, he'd have to leave this

place and find that which he feared the most. He'd have to finish the books, make his decision. And finally, he'd have to return to Talen. Although he wanted to return to Talen, Talen couldn't have him till the decision was made.

Leave the world behind and remember who you were.

Eloquent Disposition
OR
The Speaking of the Gentleman
CHAPTER FOURTEEN
Monday, March 27, 2006 7:38:11 AM

At this point, let the gentleman take his place, for he has rightfully earned it. Not as the beloved to Er-Talen and Er-Flame, but because he has trully surmounted all odds and fallen into the love of eternal order that judges angels.

I always wondered what it would be like to be in their position. The first question I asked Adam when he revealed himself was on his position and power. Perhaps it would be better if I called him Shaun at first. This man that sat across from me was the one that I had loved for years. Maybe he had gone mad with all the treatments he had undergone. I vowed that I would remain faithfully at his side till he recovered, or till his own demise. As I noticed coherency and above all, sight, I realized he was not mad. He was being deliberate and truthful. I asked about God. How foolish.

You could throw open the doors of Heaven, march right in, and find it vacant. Angels reside in all corners of existence, they are bound to nothing. Grimoires are afforded the same right to tread wherever they so choose; it is only humans, animals, and biotis that are restricted to the planes they were borne to. Heaven was once a paradise that has become nothing more than an untended garden. In fact, there are many heavens, but none are used. Souls are borne into new cycles and rare are the few that are erased from existence. There is no need for a heaven, or a hell. Your penance was given on the very plane that you were born. You lived your sentence, you had your karma. Life trully was nothing. There was no god; there were only angels. And so they had ruled for billions of years.

My life, my religion was stolen. I clutched my head in terror as I stood at the unguarded gate of the heaven that presided over this plane that I was born to. Beside Adam, he held me close hoping that his own strength would chase my terrors away. What were these heavens once used for? Humans once used them, but we had become careless and shut it out just as we did with other planes. We had given up our right to it. Was there a hell? Yes, but just as we shut and bolted the gates of our heaven, we did the same with our hell.

Then the matter of God? Adam took up my hand and placed it over the beats of the heart against his chest. The world was created by two beings. Humans misconstrued the message, but it didn't matter either way. No one wants to be worshipped, unless they were foolish enough to believe that that is a decent purpose in life. Pharaoh and Ailuros were the "gods" that created everything. No one, not even themselves, knew what created them or how it all happened. They just came into being and soon created magnificent things. They continually created and destroyed things, unaware of their own potential or even intention to do so. Then, they created a being of equal power to themselves. That's when existence changed. For centuries, they created smaller things, but once they created something equal to them, everything else fell into motion. After this equal's birth, named Lilith, soon after the other three came: Azrael, Jibril, and him. Upon death Pharaoh and Ailuros, they were taken into the

four of them, only because they were prepared to handle such a responsibility.

"Do you know what it's like to be so powerful? It's boring. The only thing that you want from life is excitement, something new. It's hard to keep yourself from destroying everything and creating something else. Instead, we create alternate planes. You continue living your existence, worshipping your gods, falling to some societal rule, hurting, saving, caring one another, and we have our fun elsewhere. I've lived on every plane, but I only got so closed. I lived under Ailuros' close eye. Enough to live yet not enough to truly experience. Teri and you are the first humans I have ever fallen in love with."

There was the aching truth behind the man I had apparently not known for so long. The sad reality was that this man was a child when compared to others who were like him. A child, I thought over to myself. I had nothing in comparison to the lives these people led. We were toys and they were the masters to us... and some were children. He didn't want to expose the entire secret, but it spilled out of him. Shauna, little Shauna, was Lilith, his elder; the sister that saved him and released him from Ailuros. That's why he was so smitten with her; it was love one could never know. It was a love between two creations forged within the destruction of their creators.

"Are you really that hurt by this revelation? Then speak the words and I'll return you to a state where you never knew me or any of this. Speak the words that give you sight. Or speak the ones that leave you beside me."

I gasped for air as I held onto his arm. This wasn't possible and yet it was happening. Everything I had known! Did he know this was going to happen to me? "Destiny has its way with humans. He provides us with the vision, the ability to see many different possibilities of what can happen to you. It's your choice to siphon between your choices. I don't know what you'll choose; I just know what choices you have and what these choices will all mean later."

I grasped onto his arm, realizing that this might not be his true form. I asked him what he was really like. He smiled and radiated so beautifully. Before my eyes a younger child he became, yes, a child. Adam, the keeper of time looked no older than sixteen. "You're age is determined by how many life cycles you've lived. This is not a representation of my true age. It's the form that I love the most, because it's the form that I was in when I was given back my freedom."

"There is no grand plan, as far as I know. Our creators came to be without knowing much about their conception. They created and destroyed, and eventually decided that all the universes were toys. They tried to recreate their own beings, in search of a purpose, and when that failed, they annihilated it. Then they essentially screwed up. They created something, in total error that they could not harness as one, but as two. They created an equal that they could either not or did not want to destroy. I don't know which option is more correct. Ailuros attempted to destroy us, but as one, she couldn't. They created everything that you have come to know, before they created us – this Earth, this solar system, and right down to every pebble on the ground. That was set into motion before we were created. Lilith was an error created when they abandoned this unique system. She became your god without you knowing. Then they returned to find that this system thrived because of nurturing. Alas, the rest of us were created.

No plans, my dearest Craven. Not for you, not for I. Just systems upon systems that gets bored and outgrows one another. We're all just kids trying to figure out some kind of meaning. And you thought you had it bad."

As I stood surveying this plane from the Heavens, I grew sick and leaned on Adam. Nothing at all. I clung to him, realizing that I was much taller than he was since he retained his “true” look. “You’re handling this much better than I assumed you would,” he said quietly. I stared hard into his youthful brown eyes; “It wasn’t a possibility that I’d be this shocked?” He looked up and then drove his hands into his pants pocket. “It was; I just thought you’d choose to cry or scream. Instead you stand beside me taking it all in. Quiet in revere, seeing me for the person you want to see me as instead of the angel I am. It’s nice.” “Why an angel?” “It was chosen before my creation, but I hear that there’s too much riding on the concept of gods. If you’d like to think of us as gods, then liken us to that of the pagan, rather than the monotheistic kind. We’re amoral; we do everything like you do because you were created in our image. Except we don’t die and there is a much smaller number of us.” He gazed out as I clutched my throat and then added, “We have wings.”

Adam once showed me his true form, but he warned that his true form would appear differently to each viewer. The form he knew himself to be was slightly complicated. The body form resembled a teenage boy; however he was engulfed in a yellowish orange sphere. The body was weakened, meaning that you could gaze through the thin skin to see small orange lights – but you could still see the form clearly. The sphere, which I have never seen, is the protection given to him by Ailuros. It automatically senses disruption and shields him. The form of the boy is a peach tint with brownish eyes and black hair. I’ve seen that and I’ve traced the orange lights that flicker throughout the body.

You could surmount the heavens and you will find nothing.

In my current state, I could wander through every plane in search of Lilith-Shauna, but I would never find her. I could demand that they return her, but “they” is an intricate system of Life and Death: Adam, Lilith, Jibril, Azrael, Sorin, Savin, and the lineage of Ra. They all have a system, no matter how chaotic it may seem. One day, they’ll destroy everything, but it will be in the name of love. And the very they will restore it too.

To my boys, I want to meet her again. Not just meet her, but be with her. I don’t want to be useless, or a tool and I don’t want to continue the lie of existence this time.

The choice to be human or angel is actually really simple. You can live on or you can live. You can give our dedication to an angel or to yourself. Either way, there is no difference, To be angel is to bask in love by other. To be human is to forever wear the mark of the turtle and the phoenix till my light is dashed. In death all I trully want is love. That has been done; I have lived. This tale is over. Dedicated to the lady who allowed us to love one anther. To the man who opened the world to the children that allowed life to shine. To the angels: Lilith, Adam, Sephiroth, and Mikhail.

“This tale isn’t over Eric... You haven’t chosen yet.”

Am I really worth of your love Adam-Shaun? Or of your love Lilith-Shauna?

The Tree of Knowledge and the Tree of Deception

CHAPTER FIFTEEN

Tuesday, March 28, 2006 4:42:17 PM

Everything before you has preexisted; therefore it will continue on without you. You are unnecessary and need to be deleted from the program. You have been deemed a hazard.

From that day on, I stood proudly beside Adam, a keeper of his secret. Though I do not care to reveal my exact role to him as yet, I stayed by him proudly. I was the selected best friend, the human that he watched over and cared for so attentively along with Teri. After the birth of Uye, the hands around him closed, keeping eyes carefully watching him and the rest of us. The only one the eyes of justice furtively ignored was the rising phoenix, Lilith. Who would want to call her to justice, especially when justice had done only wrong to Jibril and herself?

Within a few short years, I gained the trust of the eyes, which belonged to the younger generation of angels and Ra. What's more was that I came to know each role of each being in the field of trees.

The field of trees is a silly term used in jest by angels of all kinds. I came to into such knowledge after the war, which took the lives of twenty-two angels. I don't know whether that number serves to shock one, but consider that there were only fewer than seventy angels in all prior. Of ten generations that were created and created, they still were protective of their veins. The field of trees to them represents their lives, their existence, and their pseudo families. These angels had no family, for most couldn't call their creators family. They fled into the world of animals, humans, biotis, or even grimoires to fill that void. The field of trees is actually one tree – the true Tree of Knowledge and Deception.

My mind clouds with bitter judgment as I wonder if this is at all right. The tree that I speak of is a building. It's neither the castle in Ithua nor the one in Ferrol. This one exists where all can see, but only those who know that it exists will seek it out. In addition to the research I've conducted, I have been told that in the location of the building once stood a tall tree. It was hollow and served as a guiding point for angels in all dimensions. It pierced every dimension, which I was told at the time amounted to forty-two. Since then, the number has risen to over a hundred alternate planes that coexist without every confronting one another. Why? Safety. It was also believed that if those who created a single being died, that being – their creation, would die along with them, so long as the attachment remains. Lilith never spoke a word of this to me while Adam on the occasion slipped. Some angels were killed because they couldn't get away from the bonds that attached them to their creators and died as a result.

The original tree was removed in order to separate the planes, but a building was erected in its place to serve as a reminder. That very building was not created by angels, but by humans, that of the lineage of Mahesa. In it's depths rest the sole human that dedicates their life to remembering everything: the historian. It's trunk houses free-floating information about everything that it can get. The branches reaches out to grab what it can, to drag it back in. The house of Mahesa was built upon the stump of the Tree of Knowledge. Even though it has become known as the Tree of Deception, still the other trees that once surrounded that particular one grow, kindly tended to by the heathens in that building. Every kind of tree was planted and tended to, to lift the spirits of angels, and to eventually capture them to rip their wings off.

They never caught an angel's wings though. They did by accident catch Lilith and Jibril a few times, causing quite a disaster. It goes without saying that you can catch almost anyone with a heart by holding on to that which they love. Angels have no heart though; some lack emotions, which is usually a vital flaw that their creator was decisive on. In the few times that the humans inadvertently caught the duo, they threatened them with none other than Asura, the youngest.

When I first walked amongst the vast fields, I noticed something that would have normally startled me. Perhaps if I were alone, I might have been scared. Instead I was with Adam, so it was easy to be relaxed. On each tree was a part of a body that hung carelessly down from a branch. The trunks were

splashed with all sorts of colors. As I inhaled deeply, I suddenly recognized the horrid stench. Adam smiled weakly at me as he enclosed my nostrils and mouth with an oxygen mask. "This used to be a beautiful place. Some come here to mourn that which they have lost. They splatter their blood or their life essence on the trees to mark it as their own. Some of us return here to be reminded why we move forward," he explained, making his way slowly to a weeping willow. I gazed at the various kinds of trees all growing in the same place. If we could see all of this, why didn't we? "You're very basic being is afraid of pain," he answered quietly. As we got closer, his hand reached out to the small trunk and moved his fingertips across the outside. This tree was beautiful and it has no odd colours or limbs. Beside it were three other trees – a lime tree, fig tree and hornbeam, all of which were lacking the same markings. I understood that they didn't immediately choose to cling to one another, these four. It was planned that they would need each other, whether it was to survive humanity or to maintain the will to live.

I asked Adam what the Tree of Knowledge was like. He sat me down beside his own weeping willow, fingering the leaves that reached down to him; he told me that the tree was true. A huge tree whose roots extended throughout the field, somehow peacefully coexisting with the other trees. There was nothing special, except that it was huge. Huge enough so that anyone could sit upon the branches. He recanted stories of his youth (I do wonder what it's like to recall a youth that was set thousands of years ago), about how he and others would sit up there and talk. It was high on those branches that angels swore they would not create another type of species till they could figure out the mechanisms of the one already present. There they decided that anyone who birthed an angel knowingly or mated with one knowingly would become an angel. There on the branches that they decided which souls must be annihilated and which return to the cycle. The Tree of Knowledge was the representation of their lives and souls, till it was turned against them.

It was now a Tree of Deception not only for the house that was built there. Not just for the secrets that it keeps. But for the decaying bodies that feed each tree.

"If you must fear anything my Eric Craven, then you will fear loneliness alone. Nothing else." I looked up at him with a smile, "Yes, Adam." He kicked me softly in the shin, "Don't call me that. It's a personal name; probably my truest of names, but not the most loved." "Yes, Shaun."

We've had it all wrong, I thought as I glanced at each tree. The markings seem to spring to life and I held onto my oxygen mask tightly. It must have been beautiful, but it has since died, leaving a shrine to the memory. My heart started beating faster as I made my way to the hornbeam tree. I knew whose tree that was; I could feel the warmth resonating from it. I leaned in to inspect the bark, part were burnt while other spots had small carvings. Adam came up from behind, "Lilith didn't burn it; it just took on burns itself. It's her essence that it responded to. The carvings come from all those that she's hurt. Some are spirits that come in to leave their mark, or the death dealers allow them to do so. Every tree has marks made by the other species, that's what allows them to go into the next life without emotions or memories."

The death dealers or collectors: Savin and Sorin Black. I have always been unsure of their story. I believe that in a past life, their grandmother saved an angel and was able to actually see this angel's true wings. It is highly uncommon to see an angel's true wings. One may see their false wings, but their true being is said to scar the person for an eternity. I was already scarred, which meant that I would forever have the vision of all species till the angels seek to remove it or me entirely. Whatever the case may be, the Black twins had the vision, the sight of all species and all true forms. When Adam and Jibril needed time away, they would had over some responsibility to whoever was current in the line of

Ra. The line of Ra was another safety placed on angels by Pharaoh; they protected the secrets of angels while not being true full angels themselves. This by no means meant they had an allegiance or cleaned up after them, but merely that there was a mutual understanding of what had to be done. I believe during the time of the war, when souls of all species became too much to keep, Adam, Jibril and the Ra descendant sought the help of someone that could handle such a task. The Black twins were the best choice, especially since they were already close to angels... they were best friends to Azrael. During the war, they would collect souls and keep them safe till there was a safer time to put them back into circulation. After the war and the rebirth of life, Jibril and Adam, who are actually the ones who administer death, continued to rely on the Black twins. With the twins, they were able to live in humanistic form till...

One could say that they were hiding from something. Perhaps they were just bored and lived as humans till the time came. Maybe they were getting ready for the next war. No one could possibly know why most angels fled back into the world of humans after the war. They all gave themselves to petty things, never forgetting where they were. Yet at the same time, they abandoned many things, like the field of trees, the heavens and hells, possibly even the other dimensions. No one sought them out. They were licking their wounds finally understanding that they could die. They had lost a little over twenty angels, countless souls and spirits -- an unimaginable amount across all species. What they wanted and needed was unfathomable to even them.

I traced the outline of the small symbol on the tree. An ancient Egyptian symbol for the eye of Ra. "Whose the current descendant of Ra?" Adam inspected the mark closely, "A young girl, her name is Kayleigh. She's the daughter to the only male in that lineage, Daniel." "How many times has Ra marked this tree?" Adam smiled and then leaned on the tree, "Ra himself never marked it. That symbol beneath your fingertips comes from Daniel's mother, also within his line. Ra wanted all females and Daniel was the only male. He disturbed Ra's will." "Why didn't Lilith or Azrael make a female then?" Adam looked at me seriously enough, "Daniel's soul was already set into motion. He was best suited for that role and there he will remain." Was it possible that I had mixed up the stories? Was it Daniel's grandmother that saw the true form, gained the sight and was elected as a candidate for future workings? If so, then how did the twins get into this?

Adam grabbed hold of my hand and pulled me away from the tree. "There is endless information in the world. It floats around hoping to grab hold to anything that will pay it any attention. This is the worse place to be when you are not prepared to take all of that in. What was it like?" Adam asked me innocently. "What was what like?" "The information floating around. You're not properly prepared, so information was flowing through you." "I got confused about the Black twins and Daniel," I said as my voice trembled. Why was it trembling?

"This will take you back," Adam said quietly to me. We watched the sun as we walked past the beautiful assortment of trees that carried that horrid stench. As we walked past more, I could see some of the spirits lingering around certain trees, hitting it, silently screaming, or trying to tear it apart. "In their minds, they think they are inflicting some damage. The trees are so old, that they barely leave a scratch, but within that scratch houses their frustration." Was this some sort of karmic heaven then? "No." I stared him knowing that he answered a question that I didn't ask aloud. He always said he would never read my mind without my permission. "Sorry, around here, it's a habit. Knowledge has a way of speaking."

"You'll marry Teri and then what?" I asked. "Numerous possibilities of what could happen." "If Teri gave birth to a child, then what will happen?" He paused for a moment, "I assume that they'll follow

the law and send a soul into the vessel. Laws about turning someone into an angel are slightly strange. When you are married to an angel knowingly, then depending on your karmic value, you either become an angel or you're memories are devoured and you are returned to the cycle with a mark so that in the future, we know how you served. In all the years of my existence, no one has ever attained such a value. Charlotte is possibly the first in line to have a high value, but circumstances are different. She gave birth to a new breed, so value aside, she already has the mark of angel. She hasn't been turned yet, because that will come when her human body dies." Charlotte, Azrael-Vincze's human wife, the mother to Ahnaleaha, the first sahjina, the human and angel breed.

"When we are deemed hazards, we must face punishment," he continued. As we walked on, the sun was setting and in the distance I could see a tall building rise over the trees. "Our own greatest punishers are our other faces. In the garden of Ithua, there stand four statues in the center of the castles. The statues are our punishers and they bare our faces. We are our own great enemy." "How many times did you face your other half?" "They aren't our other half Eric. My statue is a part of me, it is I, but it's the part of me that I set aside so that I will always follow the rules. Just as Azrael, Lilith and Jibril did." We paused as I looked up at the gray building that shone so radiantly in the sun. "I have never faced it, but at one point the other three did. Ra told us that form of self-torture wasn't necessary. We could just look to one another if we needed punishment. We had done it enough times over the years to me masters of hurting one another," he said in an even tone. "The problem is that with this type of punishment, you need it from someone or something that cannot understand or doesn't want to understand. Being punished by someone you love hurts a lot more than from someone who is cold. But you are your own greatest judge. That's what those souls out there don't realize. A few years ago, we linked the punishment that our trees receive to the statues, so that it will always be reminded of why it must remain cold. We are all responsible for ourselves. Whether we want to know or not."

Even more so confused, we headed towards the building that the lineage of Mahesa built. "Will they welcome you with open arms," I asked. "Yes, because they are deathly afraid of Lilith. Lilith protects those who she loves; some more than others." "And you being the baby of all of them helps?" "I might be a baby to them, but I'm still your elder, Cravie-kun." "You really just can't help yourself, can you Shaun?" "Not at all. The reason we are here is because I have to pull an apple of the old Tree of Knowledge." I couldn't help but shudder when he did things like that. He knew what my concept of the tree and the apple was, but still he had to. "Stop being so human for a moment. Be my friend." I noticed a shadowy figure making it's way up to us. As I looked over, this person was completely covered from head to toe. As it got closer, a small hand reached out to shake Adam's hand.

Slowly it removed the coverings to reveal a thin woman wearing all black and an oxygen mask over her face. Her oxygen mask was completely black, linked to a small black box on her arm. My own oxygen mask was clear linked to a box on my side. I couldn't see her lips move and wondered how she could speak through it. "Guardian Adam of the earth, you couldn't resist the lands, could you? Oh, you've brought your sweetheart also." I looked at the two shocked. Adam smiled over at me, "Eric, I'd like you to meet Breahna. Breahna, hold your serpent's tongue." He winked over at her and she began laughing. "Eric, this is one of the members of the lineage of Mahesa. The current head of house that was forsaken. She's the apple I was joking about." Breahna gave him a slight push, "Forsaken? Me? She?" Adam gasped and clutched his head, "I'm so sorry my dear." He turned to me, "The current head of Mahesa's line was forsaken because she, Breahna, revealed that she wanted to be a male. Breahn is what I generally call him, but to avoid confusion, I referred to the given name. Anyhow, Breahn has always watched over my own tree. He will be leaving now that he's been cast out."

Breahn led us back to Adam's tree and kneeled before it. She pulled out a small seed from her pocket

and dug into the earth. She pushed the seed in and covered it. Instantly, flowers sprouted around the weeping willow. "I've done my job," she said with gratification. "Good bye," she waved as she walked away. I felt as if I had missed something. Adam stood tall watching the flowers and then said to me, "It'll all confuse you, but I suggest you quiet yourself and listen to what the place is trying to tell you." I listened to the sounds of the place, the rustling of the trees, the flowers as they climbed the bark of Adam's tree. Breahn or Breahna couldn't protect the tree now that she was no longer welcome here. The flowers would take in any pain that the spirits would inflict on the tree. Breahn didn't have to do this, she sincerely wanted to and Adam wasn't going to stop her in this lifetime. They were family in some sense. Breahn found her solace within knowing that somewhere, someone loved her for the twisted person she was. Luckily, she called them all family. Now she was going to find herself.

The field of trees where the Tree of Knowledge once lived is a graveyard. It holds memories, passions, frustrations, anger, love, and resentment. It represents family and overall being. Every angel, even those deceased has a tree, and beneath it lays the blood and decaying bodies of those who willingly give themselves to it. We have all severed our connections. We were all hazards.

But we were all loved.

The Cold Mask of the Other

CHAPTER SIXTEEN

Wednesday, March 29, 2006 2:14 AM

And we are loved.

In the few short years that I have breathed in this new world where four angels rule over all, Adam and Lilith left me alone with other angels rarely. In fact there was only one angel I ever really feared and it took a great resolve to pull myself together to see him. Since knowing about his true existence, I have only approached him twice, both on the advice and encouragement of Adam.

I had already fallen in love with her at that point. It was the night before Halloween that the two of us found ourselves alone preparing for the anniversary celebration of Talen and Silen. As I went over a few minor details, I found myself wishing I had at least stopped home to change. It was already eight at night and I was still in the clothes that I wore to a conference earlier that day. Occasionally I'd alter the setting of my gray pants or roll my sleeves back up after they had fallen. I'd glance over at Shauna as she was taking care of something that I felt should have no concern with. Flowers and the smell of jasmines. I knew what I felt towards her, but I also knew who she was and commanded myself to see her only as a younger sister. She was my best friend's sister, eleven years my junior. Every once in a while, she makes her way over to ask my opinion on something that just seemed trivial.

Talen checked in to see how things were going along with the planning. He joined in for barely thirty minutes when he came peeking over my shoulder. "Eric, dear, shuffling cards, again?" he said in a playful tone. I had no idea what I had done since arriving here and the proof was in the cards that I held. "If you're going to stare at my little charge, then perhaps you should seek something more." With that sentence, he pulled me away from the table that I had sat for so long. He wrapped his arm around mine and then inquired about the conference. I began assembling my notes mentally and began to speak when he put his finger over my mouth. "What colour dress is our Firefly wearing?" I knew the second he asked it, that there was a terror that registered on my face. "She isn't wearing a dress, she's wearing a shirt and jeans." He paused with a sly grin, "Oh. Must've mistaken the flowers and her dancing for a dress. How careless." "Play not this foolish game with me! Do you want me to be with

her?" I demanded in a low tone. He shrugged and turned away from me, "We can have whatever we want, and the question is would you have us?" "You two are not one! You have me!" I said forcefully as I pulled him back. He stared deeply into my eyes, which for the first time in a long time, shook me to the core, "Then get your permission, because even so." I watched Talen walk away to tend to the flowers.

"Would you like to go out on a date tomorrow?" she asked many hours after that encounter. I had no way of knowing if Talen had spoken to her about it or she has contrived this from the beginning. How do you say no, when you really want to say yes? You think about everything that could go wrong. I turned her down and left. I never, in all the years of replaying this scenario, figured out what I was doing at that table, every time I returned to it. I returned to my home, got into my bed and stared at the ceiling. No matter who or what you are in life, you cannot escape the phenomenon of being with another person or wanting to be with another person. A part of me wanted to know what each option was available to me and what each could bring. Before you can explore such a world, you must take the necessary precautions.

The anniversary party was quite vivacious and well fashioned. At the head table, I sat on Talen's right whereas Shauna sat to Silen's left. To my other side, a person dressed in a man's suit and a Venetian mask sat quietly. I could not tell if this person was male or female. I did question Talen but he waved me off, which was rare. This person was important and didn't want to be known. It was a later discovery that that was none other than Brennon, who had not revealed his new self to the family, but wanted to be present for Talen's celebration. I watched Azrael out of the corner of my eye, noticing how he kept a clever but subtle look on Talen at all times. It fed the belief that one could complete another person, but not have to be with them. As the night drew to an end, I consulted with Talen and off he sent me to see the one that I feared.

I had met Jibril once before, but then he was the younger brother to Ayame, with the name of Chris. Talen sent me through the mirror. As I stepped through the mirror, I stepped into a muddle of water on a tile floor. A bathroom that had white tiles and pale green paint. I always thought the portal mirrors were stored in better or more discreet locations. The mirror was located behind the door, so I grabbed the knob and pulled the door towards me. On the other side stood a confident figure. I looked down at him; he was slightly shorter than myself with dark blue hair that was kept long and deep blue eyes. His hands were crossed as he leaned on the side of the doorway. This wasn't how he always looked; he didn't always keep his blue eyes for show. No, this was for me; this was a symbol of his coldness. He stared intently at me for a while before he flung his arms around madly. "Fine Adam, I'll treat him nice. Just stop being the buzzing sound," he said to me. I knew that they could speak telepathically to one another, but I had no idea why he was sharing this with me. "I'm not inviting you in for tea. You are no friend of mine," he said casually running his fingers through his hair. "You know why I am here. I think we can skip the common courtesies. I just want to date her," I said coolly. Chris snickered, "You don't have to ask my permission for anything. I don't know if you noticed, but we're two different people. We belong to one another, but we don't dictate one another's life. If she accepts, then you have your answer. You didn't need me for that." "Why are you so bitter than?" A devilish smile danced across his lips, "You're better than me. I hate anyone who is better than me. And that, my dear Eric Craven, has nothing to do with Lilith."

I closed the door and looked directly into the mirror. Then I am worthy of your love, Adam and Lilith. I am not worthy of Jibril's love. I returned that night to the party and asked her out for the next day.

Our date was simple. I could've been extravagant or at least tried, but I knew that wouldn't impress her

in the slightest. Instead I showed up with a bouquet of white lilies, with a few purple orchids. I took her out to the beach so that she could be near the ocean that she loved so dearly. After several hours, we went to the restaurant that I had reservations at. From the moment we left the sight of the water, things were unusually awkward between us. I realized that had I done this yesterday, I could've put a true strain on our friendship. Even through dinner, she remained quiet. I felt as if I were blind and mute, secretly wishing that things wouldn't be harmed between us. Somewhere, between taking a sip of my wine and picking up my fork, I felt relieved. It was a split moment that the picture of her dress being taunted by the wind, but held down by the heavy coat, I inhaled the salt and saw her. Breathe. I opened my eyes and she was still there, moving the shrimps from one side to the other. "What are you doing?" "Waiting for you to come alive again." I tried to avoid her look, only to find that she began concentrating on the food again. "This is weird, something doesn't feel right between us." She looked at me thoughtfully, "I should think so. How many people are already in love on their first date? You really shouldn't have left your soul by the beach. That would have made things easier."

I didn't have to meet with Jibril, unless there was a family or friend meeting that would call his brother out of the woodwork. He never looked at me in scorn or any other emotion for that matter. He was ambivalent to my existence, probably because Adam annoyed him so. Adam was the youngest of the four and each of them spoiled him as much as they could tolerate. It was cute in a strange way, especially since in this life cycle, he was older than all of them. There would be a time when I'd have to meet him again, because I knew I wanted to marry her.

It took me much time to work up the courage to ask Jibril. More so than to even ask her. I asked Adam first, since he was so protective of his beloved younger sister. Happily he threw his arms around me and kissed me on the cheek. He called his wife (now married for over five years), and spilled the news. He thrust the phone to my ear and I could hear her voice shrill about how happy an occasion this was. When I finally calmed him down over a cup of coffee, I became very serious in asking about Jibril. Adam told me that I didn't have to ask him anything, but if that was the courtesy I wanted, then so be it. After he left, I went to the closet mirror and took myself over there. I found myself in the same bathroom. This time, he didn't expect me as since Adam didn't tell him (or warn him). Instead, I walked out of the bathroom into a narrow hallway. It was dark but I found a railing and carefully followed it to the stairs. A light glow came from the downstairs, so I slowly walked towards it.

Directly down the stairs was the entrance and to it's right was an open doorway. As I walked through, I could hear voices in the kitchen. There were no doors on any of the entrances, so I could see right through the living room into the kitchen. "What are you doing here? Or why are you here?" sputtered a woman. I didn't recognize her so I didn't bother speaking to her. Instead I watched Jibril's smirk. "He's a friend, now would you pay attention to the stove?" He was cutting carrots and didn't look up at me. Wearing a white long sleeve shirt with a simple screen on it and jeans. His hair was black and his eyes were dark brown, his entire complexion was brown. I didn't notice before that he was of Indian heritage.

"How was your trip?" I pushed one of my hands into my pockets and leaned in the doorway. Hadn't he done this same thing? I straightened myself up quickly. "It was fine." He pushed the carrots aside, put the knife down and then washed his hands. He grabbed a towel and began drying his hands, walking away from the kitchen. "Where are you going?" the lady called after him. "Just finish up, will you?"

He walked me over to a small study that actually had a door. After we got in, he closed the door and told me to be seated. He stood up by the desk and watched me in the seat. "I know you're here for some sort of permission. I told you that I don't care. Do as you please," he said in a strong but caring tone. "I

want to marry your Lilith, who happens to be my Shauna. How is it that you don't care?" Jibril smirked, "She is always my Lilith and I am always her Jibril. That's the way it will always be. What she does in each individual cycle doesn't concern me so long as I have her soul." That was what made everything okay to these sorts of creatures. Souls, nothing more or less. So long as they had the soul that completes their being, they don't care. "It must be a shame to not have the one that would complete you," he snickered. "Do you hate me?"

For the first time I saw him with a shocked look. "Yes, not because I want to," he replied. His voice was so normal; I couldn't sense any feeling at all. "Lilith and I complete one another and we are in a sense, opposites. We can only share the same feelings if we do not feel for it strongly. Otherwise, we take the opposing. Lilith, or Shauna rather, loves you immensely and because of that, there's hardly any hate in her for you. Therefore I can only experience hate. If she should love you less, then I could love you." "Why are you being nice now?" "I'm not, I'm offering an explanation. Hate doesn't imply that I will hurt you or that I cannot explain things to you. It implies that I do not love you." I looked over at him, retaining my inner peace, I forced the strange thought out of my mouth, "Do you like me then?" He laughed, "No wonder they love you so much! I like you, but I hate you. Strange, but true." "Azrael --" He stopped me for a moment, "Azrael and Adam together create one perfect being. They were not created for the purpose of balance though; they were created for different reasons. Azrael is for destiny and Adam is for time, you know that. Lilith and I are balance or harmony."

"I may like you, but I will hate you. I will always be cold towards you. Not because I want to, but I have to. You can look at this as a good or bad thing. Should you ever find yourself loved by me, then you will know what it is to be hated by her. Never believe that she will betray you, unless you find me in your bed."

Two days after that encounter, the marking of our anniversary, I proposed and she accepted. Jibril held his word, usually attempting to avoid me or acting cold if he did encounter me. He did attend the wedding, which was held in the same manner that Adam executed his. Well, almost.

We had a small wedding with family and friends. It was called the black wedding as since all decorations and dress were in black. "The beginning of everything," Adam once told me, "begins with a basic lacking." Jibril and Azrael made an appearance at this wedding to offer the blessing of the elements. Shortly after, they left taking their water and air with them. The very same day, the other wedding, the white one, took place. That one was for everyone we neglected in the first wedding, though we didn't hold up the same façade as Adam and his wife. You see, Shaun-Adam and Teri planned a huge white wedding, but hours before it, they called upon a few members of the family to dress in black to meet them. These members were escorted to the small black wedding. During the white wedding, they still made it look like this was the first marriage, but they said their "vows" in another language. It was later revealed that they were actually just having a normal conversation in place of the vows.

Our marriage was nothing special to her, or out of the ordinary than any other cycle she had been through before. She never once allowed me to believe that that was true, but I knew. Late at night I would listen to her erratic breathing and silently wonder how many times she had done this and how many times I myself had done this. But there was something different about all of this. During the day, she didn't just act the role; it was her and she was truly dedicated to being nothing less than herself. At night, while her body remained warm, she'd shudder and shiver as if awake – she worked in her sleep so that I could avoid seeing her in her true state.

That's why my two beloved angels remained unstained. That's why when Sephiroth and Mikhail joined us, they too were as unstained in my eyes. I never had to see what they did or how they did it.

In a dream once, I held Lilith-Shauna tightly to me and asked her to scar my soul with the true vision of who she was. Adam had done it already, why not further the damnation for someone else I loved. After much thought, her brown skin became translucent. It seemed that faint lines held her body together and in the center was a glowing red light. Through each strand shot a small fast moving light. The feeling of holding this thing that was held together by a human form bag. Behind the thin layer of translucent brown eyes was a sharp red that bore into my soul. This wasn't what they meant. There was another form. She sighed as the brown colour returned to its original state. But then her hair grew long and it became black and red. The defining marks, even the pores, all disappeared leaving a completely unpunctured surface, like glass. The skin's colour began shifting to a slightly lighter colour and her eyes remained red. As she continued changing, I felt myself choking on something that resembled horror and fear. Black wings stretched out of her back and continued to grow past all walls, passing through everything. I wanted to scream and I couldn't, I just remained there frozen. She had not moved her eyes from me at all, but when I returned my eyes to her own, I shot up in our bed. Clumsily I ran into the bathroom hoping, fumbling with the sink faucet. What was going to do? Cleanse myself? Drink the water? Even in those two forms, she was still beautiful, so why was I so afraid? To end this agony, I heard her voice say softly, "Am I so unloved?" I looked into the mirror and saw the image of her bent over in agony on the floor, clutching her mouth in attempt to hide her own face. That face in the mirror was different than any I've seen before. I backed away, clutching my other arm, trying to figure out why this was happening.

"I want to be returned to myself."

"Then you'll lose Shauna and Shaun. You have no self other than the dedication you have to them. You are only human."

I truly am a lucky man. Not once did Jibril ever become less cold to me, then on the day of my own death.

Death Erased

CHAPTER SEVENTEEN

Wednesday, March 29, 2006 10:27:11 AM

I know this place; this was our old home. No, not the one in Australia. This was the small one... where? Where did the children and I live, if not in Australia? I was in... Arizona? Aruba? Arizona is where Jung and Brennon live. Did I live in Aruba? She loved Aruba. I want to feel young again. I want to be that loved by a woman again.

Why was my memory fading?

I see now. You're preparing me for death, so my memories have to be taken away. You've started early. You're supposed to wait till I've made my choice before you take this body away from me.

I am loved. Now, where am I?

Eric felt the cloud on his eyes lift to reveal that he was in a park. He looked around and smiled to himself. Shaun was probably on his way to meet him now. He played around with the walking cane and slowly dragged himself up. As he brought himself straight, he looked around, taking note of all the

features of this place. Blue sky and pond, green grass with a walkway winding through. Still on the plane that he grew up on. He turned around to see the figure of Talen walking up to him. They began their daily walk through the park.

“Your choice,” Talen began. Eric wrinkled his face and pushed him away. “Strawberry and he’ll have pineapple,” Eric told the vendor. The vendor handed Eric their flavoured ice while Talen paid for it. “How do you know that I would have wanted pineapple?” Talen inquired. “They didn’t have peach,” Eric answered simply. Eric and Talen walked in silence, eating their snacks. “I don’t want to talk about,” Eric admitted, breaking the silence. Talen murmured, “I know. Why do you think we’ve been silent?” “My memories are slipping.” Talen shook his head, “It’s protocol. Human memories must be erased of angels. Even those who have the choice. You may just choose to return to the cycle ignorant or be erased altogether. It’ll hurt much more if we don’t have all of your memories to work with.” “You actually sounded cold.” Talen shook his head, before muttering, “Do you know how many times I’ve done this?” Eric kept his stare away from him, knowing that Talen probably had never done this or had done it too many times to count. The latter was impossible. “First.” Talen concentrated on the ground, “Yes and now I know why they made such a big deal about it. It hurts when you know the person. I may not have created you, but I loved you. I share memories with you. To know that you may honestly choose to forget all of that or to remove yourself completely means that I alone have the memories. That I alone know what it is to love and be loved by you. Without, there’s no reason to even have those memories, but there they will remain till... I don’t know when.”

Angels pick their own names.

“Do you want me to live forever?” Eric asked. Talen smiled at him, “I’m more selfish than that. I want you to live so long as you keep me happy.” Eric shook his head, “How dreadfully honest of you.” “Is there a way to return to the human cycle without forgetting you?” “Yes.” “Then that is my choice. Because I will never have her or you, which hurts me more than I can bear.” Talen looked deeply into his eyes and kissed him. “Don’t scare your parents too much, Anton.”

Anton Russell Sergeevich.

Standing over my fallen body was Savin, Sorin, and Talen. No one else who huddled around my body saw them; they just sort of stood over the crowd. “Do you remember what just happened?” Savin questioned. Sorin nodded to him and Adam, threw a grin at me and then left. “No,” I thought. “You drove here in a car, not far from the house in New York. Yes, you are in New York. That conversation that occurred actually did not. It was a little different, but that is irrelevant. We will begin returning your memories to you shortly. After they are all restored, they will be temporarily locked away till you are ready to understand them,” Savin said peacefully. I’ve never seen this side of him before. “Of the moments leading up to this, only two things have been true. Adam was with you and you asked if we could return you to humanity with your knowledge intact,” Savin said. Talen looked at him and nudged him, then he came closer to me; “You are dying my Eric Craven. Your new life begins as Anton Russell. I don’t like the name, but that doesn’t matter. I will find you or Monserrat, the new name of Lilith, will. Teri and I will be joining you all soon.” The world went dark, deaf, and mute.

“Ericael. Ezriel. Ezrael. Ericiel. Eriquel. Craviel. Craniel...” said a soft voice. “You’re being ridiculous.” “How long will we have to store this soul,” said the first voice. “Until judgment, I guess,” said the second.” “Silly angels and silly guardians, why would they fight over something like this?” asked the first voice. “He’s special? He’s got a decent karmic value,” answered the second voice. “What name do you think he’ll choose?” Then the world went dark, deaf, and mute again.

Breathe.

I opened my eyes to see two people standing over me. “Hello there sleeping beauty!” I looked around puzzled. “Whoa, not so fast. We have got to explain some things to you.” I looked at where this voice was coming from. It led my sight to a man, probably in his late twenties. Dark brown hair and green eyes, very light coloured skin. Beside him was a woman. She had a darker skin tone, with long silver hair and green eyes as well. Looking at the two, I realized they looked almost the same. The man smiled as took up my hand. The woman looked over me and smiled, “You really are beautiful.” She looked at him, “I’m surprised you were able to restore him.” I tried to sit up and they helped me. “I’m Daniel and this is Raphael,” said the man. I looked over at the two confused. Daniel was a descendant of Ra and Raphael was a creation of Aan and Ariel. Raphael looked at Daniel and I could hear the two silently discussing why I would think that Raphael would be male, not female. I held my head as I heard their silent conversation. “He’s eavesdropping,” Raphael said happily. “He doesn’t realize he’s doing that. We haven’t told him anything yet.” She looked at me, “So which name did you choose?” “His name is Eric for the time being,” Daniel said solemnly.

Daniel set himself up to look at me at level eye. He sat to my left as Raphael made her way to the right. I was on some metal table in what looked like a hospital room. “Savin and Adam were setting you up for your rebirth,” Daniel began. “Giving you back your memories,” Raphael added. Daniel threw her a look and then continued, “Your spirit was on its way to a new body when I intercepted you.” “Why did you intercept me?” I asked. “Did you notice anything about yourself?” Daniel asked me. I looked down at my fully clothed body and then noticed my hands. “I’m younger?” Daniel nodded, “You’ve been restored to your old body when it was approximately at the age of twenty-eight. Give or take.” “Why?” “The rules state that you should be returned to a suitable age that you requested prior to death.” I looked at him trying to recall my death. I was in the park with Adam. “I told him that I wanted to be human, not... Wait. Why have I been restored?” Daniel and Raphael smiled at one another. “See, you’re a problem to an angel’s human cycle. I thought it would be cute to intercept just for the hell of it. Deny choice – you aren’t deserving of choice. But the precious balance between my house and that of the angel’s did it for me. Choose your name.” Raphael shook her head, “Stop being a jerk Daniel, he may know angelic law, he just doesn’t know why you’re meddling.” She smiled softly at me.

“You had a choice. Although the other angels who have arranged your life and death all agree, Daniel opposes. Given his status and power, he has removed you. If you choose to be an angel, then you will not have to face judgment. Daniel has judged you an angel, which is a pretty high honour, I might add. He’s hoping the others will agree,” Raphael explained. I stared at them shocked. “The descendant of Ra wants me to be an angel, more so than Adam and Lilith?” Daniel snickered, “They want you alright. They’ll have you till you are erased, you may not know that. They are smitten with you and I know why. This is the best option that suits all of us.” “You’ve denied me choice because it’s the best option?” I asked incredulously. I couldn’t believe what was happening. These angels had no structure in place yet they were holding me to angelic law. “So what do you say? Trial or name?” Raphael asked happily.

What the hell has been done? Is this why Teri screamed for months in some other plane?

Everything is going to be different.

“Daniel, how could you do this me? How could you do this to Lilith?!” I screamed at him. He shrugged, “I’ve never done this before. I think she’ll forgive me, especially considering.” “Considering

what?” “Considering that you were denied some truth.” “What did you think about when you died?” I ran through my memories, realizing I had two different ideas of what happened. “There’s one more. It’s from Jibril. It’s going to take you back, so please, don’t forget that this, right now, is real.”

A glimmer of radiant blue light lit my sensations as I fell back on the table.

I was in the house of Mahesa, upstairs in Shaun’s room. I held his arm as I watched chest sway up and down with each breath. I watched the tubes run in and out of his body. My grip around his hand tightened. I hated to see him like this. He had just gotten out of surgery a few days ago. Here he was unable to breath on his own. I would wait here till he could breath on his own. That was the only thing this place was good for. They could provide the medical attention that he needed. Shauna was off in another room, probably yelling at Osias and Greg. I synchronized my own breathing with him and I whispered stories into the bed sheets.

Startled by a clash, I woke up. I had fallen asleep with my hands still around Shaun’s. The sound came from Sara, Donovan and Yuki, who all came in at the same time. I watched Sara carefully, for Sara was really Sariel, the creation of Adam and Lilith. I rarely saw Sara, so immediately my suspicions were raised. She looked over at me, “I’m just here to make sure he’s alright, that’s all.” Donovan and Yuki worked here, so I had no reason to be suspicious. But Sariel? She had to have come in a rush; she didn’t even use a proper guise name. I tightened my grip on his hand. He would’ve told me if there was anything wrong with Shauna. I kept my head low and continued with stories, now using old fairy tales.

I was just about to end the tale of Peter Rabbit, when I felt the cold air. Walking in calmly and brilliantly was Jibril. I let go of Shaun’s hand and watched him walk towards me. “I owe you one thing,” he pulled me out the seat and dragged me out. “I’ve done many bad things, but this actually bothers me,” he said looking straight ahead, still dragging me. We went down a flight of stairs, down the corridors. Still I remained puzzled as to what was going on. Suddenly I felt warmth from him. Something about her, something happened to her. A thousand thoughts seem to have flown throughout by brain as I tried to figure out what happened. We came upon a closed door, which I recognized to be the photography processing and development room. She was in there. He threw me against the door and kissed me on the lips. “That’s what it is to love someone,” he said and turned cold again. “My death was pending, but somehow I was foolish enough to get myself killed quickly. We didn’t warn her, so this is all rather sudden. She is dying and you deserve this as a memory, instead of whatever fucked up memory I allowed to crystallize.” The door opened and I stumbled in backwards.

She stood as tall as she could, although she was still shorter in comparison. She would’ve looked amazing under any other circumstance. I watched her back carefully, and then let my eyes drift to the screen that she was in front of. The dream that I had was playing on the screen, but only that part. Nothing that happened before or after was playing, just that clip, on mute. I heard her say to the screen, “Am I that unloved, Azrael?” Her body twitched and then she coughed, I lurched towards her when I saw the blood. Slowly she turned when she heard my footsteps, holding her hand over her mouth, she whispered my name. I grabbed her and held her tight. This was it, I was loosing her.

No, I wasn’t loosing her again. I was gaining a new alternative experience.

I held her figure up as she struggled to breathe. Blood slowly trickled out of her eyes, nose, ears, and from under her nails. No matter how much blood fell on me, I would hold her till she was gone. “I always wanted to be loved,” she said in a weak tone, “and I wanted it to be like this. I just didn’t want to scar you anymore than I already did.” “You have no right to make that decision for me,” I whispered

back. I couldn't let go of her decaying body, even if I wanted to at that point. It felt like I would have to give up everything if I did. "So then you'll find no troubles in making a decision, when the time comes."

I opened my eyes and I jolted up from the metal table. Raphael and Daniel were still there, sitting patiently beside the table. "She embedded the answer in a code," I said to them. Raphael and Daniel looked at one another. "You have a visitor," Daniel said nonchalantly. He looked over to the doorway and motioned the person to come in. It was Adam.

"I didn't think Daniel would go against my own judgment," Adam began. He stared at Daniel with the coldest stare he could probably muster up. It didn't take long before he broke into a grin though. "What am I?" I asked Adam. Raphael winked at Daniel, and then the two proceeded to leave. Adam sat down beside me and smiled carefully. "You're the same you that you were and always will be. Daniel, with the help of Raphael, created a body that will enable you to function, should the case be that you are turned into an angel. You are an angel in waiting; you have the choice to become one or to go before a trial, which will conclude that for you. It's unfair and goes against your will, if judged against you. That's the way it works though. It rarely happens that Ra's kids disagree with us, but I think Daniel took a liking to you and saw something that would be useful to the angels." "If the angels refuse, will I remember this?" "No, but you will remember this if you do become an angel," Adam answered earnestly. "Of what use could I possibly be of?" Adam grinned, "You really do not want to know, because it truly is one of those utterly romantic notions." "Daniel is turning me into an angel, because I'm loved..." Adam smiled, "There's a first time for everything."

"I didn't want to be an angel, because I never found my soul mate. I never could actually have the people that I love and I wanted to experience life differently," I resigned.

Adam laid me back down and kissed me on the forehead. "Then I will fight for your decision," he assured me. "I am not here to persuade you, but there is one person that wants to see you. She is also not here to persuade you, so don't feel annoyed if she doesn't want to talk about all of this." Red flames shot up from the floor to reach the ceiling. From the tunnel of flames stepped out Lilith. "Sorry, I had some things to take care of," she said to the both of us. She was not in a form that I could recognize. I heard their silent conversation about how she should shift into a form that I knew. She did so, returning to the form of Shauna that I once knew. She took up my hand and smiled at me, "You look ravishing."

It was possible to make the wrong decision and to be cleared of it. This only concerns things where other people know what the future holds.

"Ericiel."

The Final Decision of Doctored Memories

CHAPTER EIGHTEEN

Wednesday, March 29, 2006 11:18:02 PM

The Towers of Ithua is where the demons are kept. I woke up to find myself staring at a red ceiling with intricate black designs. The bed was large with an ebony frame, with the carvings of the phoenix. I had been here before; I recognized this as Lilith's tower. The tower of chambers within the castle. At that moment, I hated how fast one could be transported without realizing it.

They moved me after I fell back asleep, using mirrors. My memories were delicate and weak, but I still

had them. I had all of them, even the alternates of what could have happened. I flexed my back to see if there were any wings, none. Wings would mean that my fate as an angel was complete. The castle had a low stir, which brought an aching to my essence. I looked around to find no one, except the comfort of the white tigers in the other room. She was here; I could feel her in addition to just knowing. I got out of the bed and walked over to the tiger's den.

"Eric, you know Octavius and Peter, correct?" she asked. Different form again, Lilith was thinner with straight jet-black hair tumbling over her shoulder. Her eyes were a dark shade of red and she looked pale with a blue tint. She was actually frightening. "Your judgment is coming," she said to me, though not removing her eyes from the tiger. Not Lilith, this was someone else completely. "If you were an angel, then you'd be able to see my essence; the core of my being. The core of being is actually a colour, and there are so few pure colours left. I'm impure as they come," this impostor said. "I'm not an impostor," she pouted and vanished. I was alone in this large tower of an empty castle, to an empty kingdom.

I wanted to call for someone, but a part of me knew why he or she weren't there. If they were here, then they – Adam, Azrael, Lilith, Sephiroth, or Mikhail – may influence my own decision. This was to avoid persuasion. I walked back into the bedchamber, over to the writing desk. There were my three books. I had never finished my memoirs. It escaped me as to why I needed to complete them. After all, what use could it be to creatures that have infinite knowledge? I thought about Nahit and Risan, my own children, and felt the misery watch over me. My lungs were filled with air, so all I could do was scream. I screamed till I could remember why everything meant so much.

Down in the garden, in the center of the barren stood the four statues. Lilith hung on the arm of the statue of Adam while Adam sat at the feet of it. Hearing the screams come tumbling down the towers, Lilith nudged Adam. "He's taking it pretty well," she said. Adam smiled back up at her, "Really? I thought you screamed after judgment was passed, not before it." She tightened her smile and winked at him, "They are flooding him."

I could sense them, I knew they were there. They just couldn't be near me. In fury, I began pulling at my hair and throwing anything that I could. It wasn't fair, none of this was fair. We were all just toys in some ridiculous game. I was a pawn to four knights on some ridiculous game. A thousand thoughts flew throughout my mind as I felt the pain and happiness of the entire world, with all its planes of existence. Finally, I stopped and fell to floor in exhaustion. Why was I so unable to restrain my emotions?

The same woman, the impostor was holding me, along with a male whom had the same features, except that his eyes were a dark blue and skin was a red tint. I was in a small dark room with the two. They helped me up to my feet and led me to one of the walls. Simultaneously, the woman on my left held up her left hand while the male on my right held his right hand up the wall. The walls seemed to fade away and they escorted me into the place of light. When the bright light finally died down, I realized I was in the waiting room of a rather large place. It was exquisitely decorated in white marble and gold. The marble pillars stood tall, holding up the intricate gold ceiling that had spots of glass in the shape of stars and planets. We walked quietly down a hall of doors. All the doors look the same, so I had no idea which specific door the two finally chose to walk me through.

Then it struck me that this entire time I have been doing what these things wanted me to do whereas every time I met with Adam and Lilith, they instructed me to act on my own free will. I stopped and the two looked at me questioningly. "Why are you doing this?" I asked them. They both smiled exactly the

same and then answered, "What were you waiting for?" They let me go and I walked through the door. This was my own volition. They trailed behind me with grins that I could actually feel. As I made my way further into the room, it struck me that this place was bare. I had assumed that something might appear if I kept walking. I analyzed what was happening and tried to figure out what was going to happen. The two behind me, continued walking past me. After a good distance, their synchronized steps began walking up a podium. I knew something would appear. A tall podium rose and they sat down at the seats near the top on each side. They began speaking at the same time.

"Eric Craven, do you know what judgment is?"

"No."

"Do you know what your value is?"

"No."

"Not even as a person?"

"I know who and what I am as a person. I don't know my value as a person. Is there any other value I should be aware of, aside from karmic?"

"Refrain from karmic value. You have been judged as an angel."

"I've not done anything that would prove such a charge." (Was that even so bad?)

"We can hear your thoughts, refrain from holding them back. There's nothing wrong with being an angel or a human. There's nothing wrong with being judged as one. Daniel's issue is that you made the decision to be an angel but then changed it after a certain conversation you had. There's belief that someone may have swayed your decision."

"Are you seriously trying or judging me because I put some thought into my decision?"

"Yes."

"Do you beings lack morals completely? How can you just peruse my thoughts to see how I arrived at a decision? And to think that your kind is a god amongst us."

"What name have you chosen?"

"I didn't choose this!"

"Then we will further explain your situation. You are the Sir Eric Craven Raganavok of the Raven Towers, the betrothed to Our Lady Lilith and beloved to Our Lord Adam. You were created for the pleasure of happiness, nothing more. You have usurped your original purpose and thus become more. You were not supposed to have so many choices. You were supposed to be returned to the cycle, but because of the role you stole, you cannot be returned."

The woman and the man descended from the podium and came down to me. I was furious, shocked, and hurt with everything they said. I looked down to the ground in disbelief that neither of them – not Lilith or Adam came. They left me here. As I stared intensely down at the ground, a single hand embraced me and turned my face up. I knew this face, it was Asura. The twins as one were Asura. I looked at him and threw my arms around him. "I needed someone," I said to him, "but why all of this?" "If you needed them, why didn't you call them? Yes, you yearned for one of their presence, but you never said the words that would call them, regardless of all rules," Asura answered. "You're kidding," I said as I clung to him. "No. Be serious now, since you began this, not once did you say out loud that you needed or wanted them here." "Fine, then if all of you will be so silly, then I want Shaun and Shauna, or your precious Adam and Lilith with me, right now."

"Is there where all judgment takes place?" Asura looked around the room, "It's hard to imagine, but yes. Actually every door that you saw leads into this one room." "Do I still have a choice?" Just saying the word 'choice' left a bitter stain on my tongue. I hated it for its illusion. He looked at me carefully, "Yes. You do. I would tell you why you're important, but if I did, that would strip that choice from you. If I let you go, you'll never know why. Perhaps years later, when all is rectified, you will understand

why all of this was necessary.” I thought it over carefully, but could only think of one question to ask. “Why did you say ‘Our Lady’ and ‘Our Lord’?” Asura, whose back was turned to me, laughed heartily, “You could ask any question in the world, and you chose to ask that? You are enchanting, aren’t you?” He paused to look up at the ceiling, “It portrays the sky and the sea. Strange, since you can’t have them both.” He turned to wink and walked away. “When you’re older Ericiel, you’ll understand why all of this happening the way it is,” I could hear him say within the confines of my mind.

I turned to walk back towards the door. I took slow steady paces because once I stepped through this door, this room would fade away. I stepped through the door and closed it behind me. I leaned against the closed door and then turned around to open it again. The room I was in before faded, but what was in it’s place was Lilith’s tower in Ithua. I walked through and seated myself at the writing desk where the books still were.

Then I’ll be the angel, Ericiel. I am certain of this now and I know it’s going to hurt.

Sir Eric Craven of the Raven Towers

OR

Interim

CHAPTER NINETEEN

Saturday, April 01, 2006 7:13:54 PM

Within this tower I paced back and forth, the end of this life has not occurred for the new one to begin. Within this tower I've come to know every crevice, every detail, every space that Lilith created and decorated by hand. I have gone throughout this entire castle and even gone through Adam's castle. I dare not breach the cool corners of Azrael and Jibril's own castles. It's hard to imagine that I've come to know these vast castles within the three days of being placed here.

The loneliness of just being here. There’s a whole world that is going on within these four castles that is completely ambivalent to the plane that it exists on. They know that other realms exist, but they don’t care. They live to serve those who come to stay in these castles. Who would live a life of such servitude? I would wander about and glance upon the faces of the people who worked here for nothing. No compensation, just being here, possibly not knowing why they were here. Were they created just for the purpose of serving?

My entire wardrobe was reduced to the colour of black. I would walk around in a black shirt, pants, shoes, or coat. No one visited or made their presence known. They, Adam and Lilith, didn’t even wander around the courtyard watching the tower from afar. There was nothing here except for the mirrors that I could use to escape. Where would I escape to? Whose watchful eye was I avoiding? The two that I trusted the most weren’t here, so there must be a good reason. I have the decision to wait miserably or happily for what is to come.

Often enough, I’d sit in the ledge of the stone window in the tower. Leaning out to see the vast horizon. Certainly the water, mountain ridge and barren desert served to protect the castles from intrusion. Yet they painted a beautiful picture of what laid beyond that. The vast ocean or the rich lands of existence. When I was done being mesmerized with the window, I’d return to my walks. Through the passageways and long corridors, amongst the several rooms were mirrors of all sorts. This place was open to any internal intrusion, yet no one feared. There was a part of me that would hope that either the two or even the cold hearted Jibril would visit. Instead, the fifth day came and went, leading me alone down the corridors.

I had to trust them just as I loved them. They trusted and loved me – there must a mutual understanding for any of this to work. Let the waiting continue.

During the eighth day, I wore a black turtleneck with black pants. I tied my hair up and walked into the rest of the castle, into the kitchen. As I prepared lunch for myself, much to the chef's dismay, it occurred to me that I wasn't screaming. It seemed so trivial, but I couldn't remember why I screamed before. Why was life now normal? The light reflected off my glasses as I carefully turned down the heat. Everything was new and old all the same.

Let the waiting continue.

The Fall of the Tower

CHAPTER TWENTY

Sunday, April 2, 2006 5:31AM

My eyes slowly fluttered open to find the twelfth enchanting greeting of the ceiling. I felt the warm embrace of the bed as if it were something new. The red silk sheet draped my body carefully as if someone placed it there. Why was there silk on this bed? Lilith/Shaina hated sleeping on silk. Sure it was a wonderful material but it served no purpose for someone whom was victim to the cold. It was probably the joys of having a warm bed that allowed someone to experience the joys of silk. One of the usual servants, Raelyn, came in without knocking, much to my surprise. As she strolled in, I quickly gathered the sheet up to cover myself and turned away. "Sir Craven, I've a letter for you," she said. I turned over to face her, then reached out for the letter. "Why do you serve this castle?" Raelyn smiled, "I don't serve the castle nor the inhabitants of the castle. I serve myself because I'm training." I sat up, "Training for? Then why be in servitude. I do see the reasoning behind having servants in a place such as this. It's quite vast and needs maintenance, but do you ever enjoy the place you're in?" Raelyn smiled coyly and brushed her dark brown hair aside, revealing a deep green eyes colour. "I do enjoy this place. I also know that's there is a secret in here that must be kept. I serve that unknown secret, while being true to myself," she replied. Slightly taken aback, I tried to keep my face straight. "I've heard about the secret, that how some are bound to serve and protect it. But those are only knights," I said calmly. "I am training to be a knight," she said. Without waiting for a reply, she turned away, heading towards the door. I fingered the creme envelope with a wax burgundy seal. The seal was bare, just a flourish.

I opened it up carefully as to not get any of the broken seal onto the bed. Opening it up with renewed vigor, I careful poured my attention into everything written. It was written with a fountain calligraphy pen, which meant that each stroke was discreetly applied.

"My dear Eric, stuck in the tower of fire. Sorry I've been absent for so long. We've been taken with some matters that had to be dealt with as soon as possible. With the recent decision that you made, we've had to alter a few things in our practice. Rest assured that though we are not present, we watch over you carefully making sure that you are as comfortable and rested as the situation can provide.

I refuse to leave details out for you, although some I must. You will come to find out in time why such is the case. For the time being, a counsel has been called to deal with you. New angels are a rare thing, so certain issues relating to body, allegiance (not the kind you're used to thinking of), and soul must be worked out. The counsel has convened once already at the place where kings meet on the fourteenth plane of the eighteen planet during the tenth rotation. We will meet again, with lesser numbers, along

with you at the same place on the eleventh planet, in the twenty-third galaxy, near the sixty-fourth star. I know those numbers sound ridiculous but on the eve of my visit (or Shaun's; depends on who gets there first), we will explain it further.

You should know that you have raised the attention of Rüstesihan, who will bring down the stars if need be for your protection.

This letter does not make up for our lacking over the twelve days. I miss you terribly and love you so. Take care and be well. We will not fail you.

With Love, Shauna”

I smiled at the letter. Rüstesihan is involved now; he always did want to take me on as an apprentice. I remember teaching at his school, how he'd beg for me to remain with him and his students. They always enjoyed my teaching sessions or lectures. I read the letter over once more, knowing what everything meant. Rüstesihan was part of the counsel and has been trying to reconcile the differences between my first and second choice. As probably Lilith and Adam were. Though I am sure that they've been up to something else as well. The first counsel meeting must of included Adam, Lilith, Azrael, Jibril, a member from each generation after them, Rüstesihan, Daniel, possibly even Ra – whomever was there, there had to have been at least fifteen in attendance. That meeting must have taken place at 1:18 in the morning, though I couldn't fathom what the fourteen meant. The second meeting's numbers were somewhat harder to decipher. I knew that times were always backwards while dates were forward. Whenever the case, I'd trust Adam and Lilith or Shaun and Shauna.

Finally tumbling out of bed, I went to go freshen up to begin and eventually end my twelfth day in this place.

The thirteenth day came while the ceiling greeted me again. Shauna/Lilith/Monserrat killed her current self for some reason. Adam/Shawn continues to live because he has not yet brought this cycle to an end. That's the matter they were tending to. Who allowed me to know that?

Raelyn walked in again, the same manner as she did yesterday. “Good mourning Sir Craven!” she said cheerfully. She handed me another letter and waved me off before I could talk. I looked down at the creme envelope with a burgundy wax seal that only had a flourish for decor. I opened the letter carefully on the bed and read it. This time the contents was typed and had only one line. “The beginning comes with an end of live, fear not for your consciousness will remain intact while we begin the procedure.”

Wide eyed, I stared back at this letter in absolute fear. I would die again? How many times must this happen before I am? “Trully immortal?” I heard a voice say. It was in my mind so I didn't bother questioning or trying to figure out to whose it belonged to. Though I did wonder if I was psychologically impaired. Conceivably so, I could be locked away in an asylum somewhere while living in my imagination. Or like in one of those philosophy texts that Shaun and Shauna so adamantly studied, I could just be a brain in a vat. Consciousness was being stimulated and I was creating this entire world. How does one escape such a bind?

I went to get cleaned up and began thinking again that I must begin this thirteenth day, so that it may end. Thirteen... I began thinking about tarot cards. Shauna so loved her tarot cards, taking meticulous care of them. What was the thirteenth card? I remember she once explained that you could use a regular deck of playing cards, but that would be called... I struggled with the memory. I stepped into the

shower and let the water drip down. Staring the drops at they hit the floor; I kept trying to remember. My own card, had I forgotten my own card? Especially after so many times that she told me about her own and her friends. Yes, Mariel the Empress, Vani the Hierophant, Sharlene the High Priestess or... Sharlene was a dual number, but her other card. Yes! Sharlene the eleventh; Justice. What of myself? Then it hit me. I was the Magician and the thirteenth card was Death.

Death, she always reminded me, meant a new beginning. I scoffed at the idea. They would not have purposely waited for the thirteenth day. It was too simple; too well orchestrated. Then I'd have to be on guard the entire day – just in case they did find it significant. Yet, at the back of mind, I knew they wouldn't – they hated living to others expectations.

I was right, I thought as I woke up the next day.

On the sixteenth day, Lilith appeared beside me in bed. There she was, sleeping with me, all curled up. The amount of warmth that emanated from her body shook me. Happiness flushed over me as I reached out to kiss her. I noticed then that she had added a fleece blanket to the bed. Slowly she opened her eyes and tightened her grip around me. "Sorry I was late," she murmured. "You weren't late, just..." "Sorry that we're being so withdrawn and mysterious," she said as she buried her head on my chest. "It wouldn't be the first time you've done that," I replied. Yes, I had to separate her from him. When they are away from me, then they are one but when I have one with me, they were single again. The same side of two different coins. "I want to tell you what I can, but can we just hold off on that?" she said humbly. I smiled, "I missed you."

Hours later we got up and got ourselves ready. It was another day that must find it's end, but there was someone that mattered here to make it better. "Would you believe that some of them thought that you would have to jump out of the tower?" she said as she fiddled with the cuff links on her shirt. I walked over and set them for her. "It doesn't surprise me. I suppose that came from the younger ones who haven't lived for so long. They don't know how things work," I said in a bemused manner. Her straight hair reached down her back only to form small ringlets at the bottom. She wore the oxford shirt with a tie and had on gray dress pants. After I set the cuff links and the tie straight, she pulled over the black vest with the Tannen family crest. "You do have clothes that aren't black after all," I commented. She looked around before bringing her eyes back to me. "I forgot to leave clothes other than black... Sorry," she said with a sad smile. "The Tannen crest, so the counsel is meeting soon? Or is it a human venture?" I asked. Her face lit up; "The counsel will be meeting shortly. If some rascal comes to tell you to jump out of the tower, don't do it. This isn't for the counsel though." I expected her to vanish; instead she walked me over to large wardrobe that I had been taking my clothes from. She closed the closet door and looked at me. I looked down at my own black shirt and black pants. "You could have mentioned to someone that all you had were black clothes," she said with a wink. She then slammed the doors of the closet, waited a few seconds, and then reopened it. Half of my clothes, although of the same design as before, were now in earthy tones.

The secret, I wanted to know about it. I hesitated to ask because I knew that it wasn't my place to ask. But my place hasn't been defined, I countered. I watched her walk away as I pulled the pair of khakis out of the closet. I didn't mind the black shirt, but I could use a change. After changing that article, I walked back over to the bed, where she was folding the sheets. "The secret?" I asked within a whisper. She turned to smile, "I cannot tell you about that." "Why not Lilith?" I asked. Her face dropped so quickly, it was disheartening. I felt compelled to ask her what was wrong, but instead she spoke quickly. In a rather cold tone, "Don't call me that. I know it's my name, but it carries such responsibility and burden with it." I knew that she always had issues with her name. Over the years of being with her, I continually developed new names to call her as since she never liked "real" names. She didn't want to be called Lilith, nor Shauna, nor Raven. Fake names meant more. No, that wasn't

the right explanation. When you created a false name for her, you establish a personal link that no one could tread on. She was your “Firefly,” or your “Morphenia,” or that “Raven.” Sure others could dare call her the same, but it didn’t carry the same weight or meaning.

She stiffened quickly, not waiting for a response. “The secret is known, kept, and tended to by Azrael, Jibril, Adam and myself. It is then guarded by the other sixteen knights, who do not know what it is, but trusts in us. Knights in training trusts in the belief of the twenty of us.” “Lovie, I know that already,” I answered. “Where are you heading?” I asked. A small smile returned to her face, “I have to return as a representative of Shaun’s family to take care of some matters concerning the estate. He will die soon and considering that I’ve died already, there’s no one to tend to the human matters.” I looked over at her in this form of Shauna with a questioning stare, “Like that?” She smiled and dropped the folded blanket to the bed, “No, I’ll change. Although the Tannen crest will help the situation a bit.” “Amongst the four possible inheritors of the estate, to whom...” Her eyebrow raised a bit, “I forgot about my own honestly. I guess the eldest: Nahit and Uye. Although I can’t imagine what Nahit would do with such a title and property. Risan would decline it and I have no idea what Vincent would do. I think if the four decline, then it will go to his cousins.”

I don’t want to be here forever.

She left after a while, though it looked like she was battling herself to leave. Almost as if she couldn’t bear being apart from me again. Either that or she knew of misery and wanted to take me with, but knew she couldn’t. Why couldn’t she though? I wandered through the corridors of the castle again till I could find some solace. It would be my luck that upon passing a room, the door flung open to reveal Aliah. Aliah, with jet-black medium length hair with one eye green and the other brown and two long fangs on each side of his crooked smile. I stared back at his menacing stance and folded my arms. “How have your studies been going?” I asked him. His crooked smile straightened up as did his posture, “Going great professor! I did perform better with you teaching though. Why don’t you come back to the school after this whole nonsense is done?”

Aliah and I went into the kitchen, where again, to the chef’s horror, I prepared us some tea. “I feel compelled to ask,” I began. Aliah shrugged, “We’re not banned from seeing you, just busy. Counsel members are feeling quite full of themselves because they were selected for counsel. There hasn’t been a real counsel since the great trials. Making a human angel is usually not a big deal, but since Daniel stepped in against your wishes and, not to mention you changing your decision. Special provisions have to be made for the one who gained so much attention and affection.” “Breathe,” I reminded him. I turned away slowly counting the seconds for the tea to steep. “I guess you weren’t selected for the counsel,” I said as evenly as I could. I turned to catch his face light up. “Nope. Counsel members were selected and agreed upon by Rüstesihan and Daniel. For each generation, the representative didn’t have contact with you, or at least didn’t have a lot. You can imagine Rüstesihan sitting there distraught, knowing that you taught almost all of us.” I smiled at him; “Why?” He winced, “We the great beings, some call us angels, some call us gods – which really sucks, I really hate that title, some call us elves or fairies... We the great ones... Get bored. Often and a lot. I mean you live for a few thousands of years and you quickly realize that it’s boring and repetitive. That’s why wars happen, by the way. Now imagine you’re like millions of years old. Boring... So damn boring, you actually think about killing yourself to see if that’s another journey like this one. I mean, who knows, maybe we’re just pawns in someone else’s game...” he trailed off as I handed him his cup. “Peppermint tea?” he asked after taking a sip. “Cease your paranoia. My own cup is of peppermint, yours is a black blend,” I answered nonchalantly. Aliah always had a fear of peppermint tea and would assume it was in his cup when he smelled it.

“Sixteenth day, huh?” he said after finishing his tea. I stared at him in awe. My own cup was still hot with steam still rising. “Sixteen is a beautiful number, I think. Sixteen on the major arcana is the tower,” he said staring off into space. “What’s the significance of the tower?” I asked. He shrugged and scrunched his face, “No idea. Human traditions like tarot cards are beyond me.”

“Aliah, how come my children haven’t visited?” Aliah looked up slightly surprised that I even asked. The question randomly popped into mind as I sipped at a leisurely pace. Still looking lost, he scrambled to provide an answer. “I guess they are busy. I mean, I was busy too. There’s also the human life I’m undergoing that kept me away. In this life cycle, I’m twelve with the nosiest parents I’ve ever encountered. It was cute before, but now I feel like they really think I’m not allowed to stop breathing without their consent.” No wonder he had a childish flair to him. The age they were in any given cycle tend to rub off on them even after they escaped it. The role had to grow with them. “Come to think of it, I haven’t heard Risan yelling at the wind in a while,” he said loudly to himself. “Still yelling at the wind?” “You know what he’s like better than I do. I don’t think he’ll ever stop getting mad at things that don’t deserve to be yelled at. He definitely won’t stop yelling at things that will never change their ways,” Aliah said.

Long after Aliah’s departure, I found myself roaming the library of this castle. Several hours later, I retired for the night realizing my loneliness. Not long after thinking that, Lilith showed up. “Perish the thought!” she exclaimed with an embrace. As we lay in one another’s arms in the bed, I tried to dedicate everything to memory. Her muffled voice rose around eleven. “I want to tell you everything, but at the same time, you will come to know everything. Don’t think that I’ve left anything out purposely when you come into infinite knowledge.” I thought about how Aliah mentioned that there could be more to everything that they do know, thus reducing their infinite knowledge to just being finite. I held her close and whispered, “That’s okay. Everything I need to know will come to me when I am ready.” She moved herself up so that she could stare into my eyes. “Then you should get ready soon, because on the day of the Tower, everything you know will change.”

Not a dream, huh? Why didn’t you give me more of a warning?

I thought back trying to remember. Many numbers had fallen into my possession in the last few days. I knew that Savin and Daniel were near me. I couldn’t see, just feel. And it felt like I fell out of the tower and went tumbling into an abyss. “Don’t worry Sir Eric Craven Raganavok of the Raven Towers. You’re not dead, you’ve just been reduced to a soul so that we can fix a flaw. We’re going to keep your consciousness intact while your body is altered,” Savin said magnificently. Adam was there, I felt him.

Then why is everything so dark?

“Because you have no eyes my dear Eric. If you would like, you can use my own.”

I’m fine, as long as you keep me safe.

“I will my love.”

Shaun?

“Yes.”

Did I fall out of the tower?

“No, we came to take you when you were asleep. You fell asleep with Shauna and then we came before the night was over. You will remember later on. You should rest now.”

Where have you been all this time?

“I aiding the creation of your wings and overseeing the possible alterations to your body. Shauna and myself had to take care of a few human matters, as she told you. Then we worked to create something

that would always be yours – a part of her and myself.”

Akin to Sarel.

“No, Eric, you stand alone in this uniqueness. Not even my wife shares this boast.”

What was your tarot card? I can’t seem to remember Shaun.

The Skin’s Atonement

CHAPTER TWENTY-ONE

Tuesday, April 04, 2006 4:20:34 PM

The warmth I experienced being in Shaun’s care was overwhelming. If I had a body, I was sure that my skin would be a bright red, flushed with love and happiness. They had temporarily suspended my thinking, so I could only accept what was happening to me. The darkness ensued but I felt safe. The love and happiness soared when Shauna came to spend time with me (or to oversee the process). I saw nothing, but I could feel their pleasure and happiness with what was happening.

Then there was a change. Their happiness was altered with a hit of sadness. Softly was the voice of Shauna, “This part is going to hurt, a lot.” Shaun’s soft voice added, “Remember during your agony, that the pain is only temporary.” Agony?

Agony doesn’t describe it.

Consciousness dashed, I awoke in my new body. It was the same one as before, nothing felt new. Everything was the same. I looked up to see Shaun, Shauna, Daniel, and Savin staring back at me. The room was completely white, with no distinguishing features. Not even a shadow to give anything depth. I looked at my hands, which looked and felt normal. Daniel came closer and took up my hand. “Is everything okay?” I nodded weakly. When was this supposed to hurt? Shaun and Shauna came closer with small lights in their hands. Daniel put his hand on my head and applied pressure, “Now,” he said simply to me. Their hands went through my body, letting the lights loose in there. Not afraid, I reassured myself. I felt the lights, which were these warm surges running up and down my body. They finally settled in what should be the spot of my heart, which made me realize, this body has no heart. It has myself and their... essence.

Then it clicked. Flashbacks or flashes about everything that happened or was happening occurred. I screamed and screamed, as I registered everything that was happening in the world. All the history, the moments of conceptions, the deaths, everything. Risan who smiled back, “Spying on me only seconds after becoming one of us? Shame on you dad.” Nahit, who shook his head, “Don’t travel the world dad, focus on that room that your body is in first.” I wanted to listen, but the pain of everyone and everything. Everything had life and everything had happiness and everything had pain. Every moment was being registered. Lilith’s journeys and Adam’s escapes. Their first bodies, first life cycles. The life cycles and deaths of all the angels. This was their knowledge, not just everything that meant something to the world. Not just the amount of planets, souls, trees, but everything.

As I writhed beneath my pain, I felt everything synchronizing as if it were an orchestra. Everything you needed to be, everything you needed to do will eventually come. You will be where you need to be to complete the sequence. The unity of every atom in the universe meshed with my being. As beautifully peaceful it was I felt like I was being ripped apart. Harmonizing into neutrality, I squirmed in both agony and ecstasy. Nothing in my life before, no, not even the hundreds of lives left that all breathed life into me could give birth to the words that could make you understand. Every death I experienced, every life born, everything I had done. The lies, the torment, the happiness. The first person I as a soul

ever loved down to the first creation I made as a human. Every memory flooded my senses as the memories of every other species came into me.

What was this? This was the essence of life. This is why we live and why we have such fear. Yes, it's like a toy and yes it's miraculously beautiful and ridiculously painful. Our hopes are raised and dashed, but we continue to live. The will to survive feasts on this fear. It's the love of others that sustains us...

It...

Is being?

Agony couldn't describe the pain and hatred I felt. Certainly it couldn't touch the ecstasy I felt. Nor could ecstasy explain the joy and love. No words were adequate enough to hold it all in. Before I could recognize it, I felt them kneeling with their hands over their ears. The voice escaped all reason as it shot out of me into the sky. I dug my nails deep into my chest to claw out that thing that made this happen to me. It was too late it was already circulating. It wasn't a piece, no not like the organ of the heart that would end this misery. It was what I was now. Blood dripped on the floor, but slowly after easing it, it came back into my body.

Screaming is all I could do. Through my hands that held my mouth, I could still hear my terrified screams.

The beauty of the world is because it's flawed. It's because people have the determination to make it work. It's because people want and desire love. It's because of love and the fear of loss.

Thoughts and images flashed throughout my consciousness has everything tried to register itself. "Only temporary?!" I screamed. Yes, life was beautiful, but so was death. The void and the vacuum was equally as beautiful, just give it a chance.

Concerto of the Renewed

CHAPTER TWENTY-TWO

Tuesday, April 04, 2006 4:33:09 PM

Keep screaming.

Addendum: Our Sir Eric Craven Raganavok of the Raven Towers' (Ericiel's) wails and shrieks reverberated throughout ninety-nine planes of existence. During his transition, he was moved to the castles of Ithua, where he remained till he could regain himself. Visitation was granted only to those directly involved with his evolution. (Signed, Kayleigh)

When She Speaks the World Listens

OR

The Marquisates Possession

CHAPTER TWENTY-THREE

Friday, April 07, 2006 3:40:02 PM

"Gently brushing his hair aside, I took him into my arms. I didn't cease his pain; he finally realized that he could stop it on his own. We are of our own free will, regardless of what you are." (The words of Lady Lilia [Lilith] Violina as reported by Serbyniva, chambermaid for that day).

I gazed into her eyes as she held me close. Yes, I had finally ended my screams to find that several days had elapsed. I tried to figure out how long I had been here, but days felt like minutes while seconds flew out the window. As I pondered the deep brown and red hues of Shauna's eyes, the numbers clicked in my head. Seven months, sixty-seven days, eight hours, and thirteen seconds. Yet there was no pain, nor hunger, or need for anything. I felt almost complete yet there was a gaping hole within me that I knew about. Yet it didn't disturb me. As I thought about it more, nothing disturbed me. She held me tightly as I listened to the deafening silence in my mind. "What happened to me?" I thought out loud. She looked down at me, "You've figured out what you need to do and what you want to do. You figured out how to quiet the world so that you can function."

I melted into her being or so it seemed. All that time that I had cried and screamed I was reacting to the pain that was thrown upon my chest. Now I've finally figured out how to quiet it all, I just deal with what I need to. She held me close watching me ruefully as I sorted out the madness within me. Long slender fingers and thin white wrists that reminded me of younger years. I could see the veins running through and though I could not see where they all met, I knew. Almost as if I could project the person that I was so many times before in front of the person I am now. The blonde hair and blue eyes of my father remained, tainted with specks of red and orange. These specks weren't visible to anyone who didn't know what to look for. My facial features, slender and soft, resembling my father more so than mother. Correction: my last life cycle's parents. I was a preserved butterfly to the memory of what they were and what they can no longer attain. I stared back at her... Shauna. I didn't know what I was to call her now, or who she was to me now. She had gone through thousands of names before this moment and only one was mine.

Slowly I got up with her help, even though both she and I knew I didn't need it. I wanted to ask her if I was now the Ericiel, the identity shoved onto me. She shook her head in response to the question I didn't ask. Immediately shocked, I stared furiously at her. "When you were human, I respected your wishes to not go through your mind. You were connected to me but not vice versa, so I kept it so. Now, you have an open link to me. I cannot regard your wishes unless they don't concern communication with me," she explained. "And you are who you want to be. You don't have to be Raphael's 'Ericiel.' You could be Shaun's 'Ericiel.' You could even be Shaun's 'Markus,' if you wanted. It's your identity wholly now you've that right. Before you jump to some new tangent, don't get upset that the other six billion humans aren't entitled to the same choice you are. I'm going to reiterate that, six billion. Six billion voices you can hear all at once, that can't hear you. Do you really want to open that flood gate?" I shook my head; I could only imagine what such a large amount could do. Even now, I still am in awe of that number. There are so little angels in comparison it actually seemed disheartening.

"I am not someone that will be cast away so easily," I told her. "I am the same human you knew before." Even as I said the words, the truth of it dawned on each syllable. When you give someone life, you must bear the responsibility of knowing that they have a life of their own and they will seek their freedom. A secret that Shaun and Shauna kept from me for so long lay open and vulnerable: they were afraid that immortality would take me away from them. That was the reason they didn't persuade me, because of their own fear. No, I must reprimand myself. I am endowed with vision and knowledge, but they have access to various alternatives. They were afraid of something coming. I watched her out of the corner of my eye tend to something that was trivial. She was avoiding my glare and blocking her thoughts.

Everything was sadly different now. Now, she could hear me and I could hear her. It's a simple block, more like a request to not pry. Usually such a request is heeded. I watched her while trying to figure out

what she was hiding, yet at the same time worrying about the time that passed that I had wasted. I spent so much time away. In spite of that, I have nothing to take care of -- nothing to tend to. Usually when once is incapacitated for more than seven months... eight months, there'd be something to do -- if even to change clothes. Instead I found myself in warmly fresh clothes, different than before my lapse. No hunger, no tiredness -- I felt completely healthy. As if I had nothing to worry about ever. There were still some things to take care of.

Lady Violina of the Raven Towers – A pun on the usual. No one considered her of lady-like status till after Shaun's inheritance revealed to include her. The Raven Towers? A false place that angels attributed to the chamber tower of the castle in Ithua. I was called Sir, a lesser title to her, still of equal standing. Both "Sir and Lady" a gift from the marquis, Shaun Tannen.

"What are you hiding?" I asked. "The alternatives to what could happen," Shauna said simply. "You've been wondering for a while now, why didn't you ask earlier?" I watched the skirt folds kick up as she paced slowly. A black lace corset with hints of gray and blue. The skirt was blue and black with several layers. Her hair was hair was tied up but there was a black rose tucked away. She never wore flowers in her hair...

"Then what could've happened?" "You mean what can happen," she corrected. I nodded in acceptance of her correction. "You could go back into the human cycle to learn what it's like from a new view. You could float endlessly through planes learning what you can about this place now that you can. You can go to Rüstesihan's school to teach or to undertake apprenticeship. You may very well just kill us all. We might loose you forever. Or you may loose us, never attaining what you wanted when you first accepted this sad fate. Either way... I won't repeat." I saw her features shine above all the black, yet I couldn't help but see that rose in her hair. "What name did Teri choose?" Shauna looked at me puzzled, "She didn't die yet; she's not an angel." She added with a smile, "Don't let time mess around with you like that."

Shoving my hands into the dark brown pants I was wearing, I walked over to the mirror. Everything I knew before was correct. "We are who we come from certainly so, we shall be," I murmured to my reflection. The maple wood caressed the mirror as it stood tall. Fine engravings along the side ran towards the top. I adjusted the black tee shirt I had on. She looked at me intrigued, as if I were like some kind of mannequin that had come to life. Between treating me as a child, lover, brother, father and husband, I couldn't figure out just what to do or say without evoking a new role. Shauna came over and took up my hand, watching me as I stared into the mirror, attempting to not shift my glare. She took the rose out of her hair and handed it to me. On it's short stem small thorns were still present, leading up to what was a black tip. At the very bottom of each petal was a small hint of red. As I reached for it, the tips of my fingers felt strange. They brushed slightly against the step, which led the red in the petals to flare up towards the top. I took it into my hand and watched the black rose turn completely red with hints of peach. "If you have something to tell me, then why don't you just say it," I thought. She smiled softly, "You want to see Shaun. But you have a meeting to attend."

This red with peach rose would look wonderful in a pocket. I inspected it carefully, trying to note the patterns of the peach. When I looked up to check my reflection, my clothes were altered. A white oxford underneath a dark brown vest with pants to match. The suit coat was a tad lighter than the vest and pants whereas the shoes matched. The tie matched the colour of the coat almost exactly.

"Before you ponder on clothes changing, you should wonder about transport. Mirrors are always choice, but..." she said as she walked towards the window which appeared a bit larger this time. A part

of me expected her to jump out the window. Somewhere during the fall she'd spread her wings to take flight.

Who would fall over the ledge?

I felt my wings spread high above me. I looked up to see them reaching high above me. It didn't feel any different than my arms being attached to my body. I flexed them to see how they work with the rest of my body. They were like the feathery wings of angels that I had always thought about but gave no justice to. Each feather glistened in the sun. I could see small rays of light being filtered through each gray feather. White feathers were closely knit to them, carefully tucking away the bone structure that was attached to the rest of skeleton system. I watched Shauna overhead, with her left arm extended to help me. Her black wings extended high and away from the rest of her to allow her to help me. I felt like a baby bird learning how to fly, except that there was a part of me that knew already. I knew the theory, but now it was time for the application.

Frustratingly I requested that they flap. I knew that the human body wasn't capable of doing this. Still, she waited patiently for me. I could hear her wings move up and down alternating the air. This wasn't the only way to get places, I realized. "Where do I need to be?" I asked her. "Follow the trail of fire," was the response I received in mind. With that, flames licked up her sides before devouring her completely. Off it shot and I was determined to follow.

The will to survive is embedded in our beings.
The will to be with someone is just as well embedded.

The Marquisates Possession (Continued)

CHAPTER TWENTY-FOUR

Sunday, April 09, 2006 5:24:51 PM

The coldness of the air washed over me as I bathed in the warm of the trail of fire. It was almost second nature, to not know what I was doing or why I was doing. Yet there it was happening, unraveling in front of me. I mustered my strength and conviction to sort out my thoughts. Who was I to these beings? I was now one of them so what does that make me? I am not an angel. Did it ever occur to me before that they themselves don't consider themselves angels? They just think that they have something more than a human? What was knowing and wanting something from anyone?

The thoughts flew around my mind as we got to the meeting place. It wasn't an extravagant place, just an expanse of land with a greenhouse. It seemed out of place, yet it seemed like the only thing that really dedicated itself to the land that it stood on. I watched how the flames touch down, slowly lifting to reveal the being I once knew. I landed some feet away from her. As I felt my feet touch the ground, she had a look that I was accustom to. The one where she wanted to hug me or hold my hand, but felt she wasn't allowed to. We had spent the last ten years apart. In the time we've spent together that brought about the end of my human life and the beginning of this new one, we've barely had any contact that was decent enough to sustain what we once had.

Yet I didn't love her less. Now I had to learn everything once again. "Or maybe I need to learn all about you," she said, walking over to the greenhouse which was a considerable distance away. Since she had begun walking, I trailed behind her. This isn't the way to start things. I sped up to walk along side of her. I brushed against her arm, and then took her hand in mine. A small smile crept onto her face as we

walked together.

We walked straight into the greenhouse, through the glass panes. As we walked pass the panes, I could see leaves crawling up each wall. As I looked around, I saw through the leaves and vines to find that there were no doors. This was a place sacred to those who were invited. It was their last standing sanctuary. The place where kings meet was more than a sanctuary; it was the beginning and the ending place of all species. I noted the different species, the different things that inhabited this place. Yes, it looked small from the outside, but within the walls, the place was vast. Animals – creatures I couldn't even fathom roamed this place.

A green creature, oh if I could describe her! Her name was Aamele, Aamele, came up to me. Piercing purple eyes set deep with no nose and a small cut that represented her mouth. Her face attached to a long neck that extended from a small body that had three legs. "Welcome Ericiel." I watched her leave with a silver light following her.

Shauna calmly took up my arm and led me elsewhere in the greenhouse. Paths were treaded lands that were well worn. The best way to navigate the place was to follow the intricate design of the fences. She led me hand in hand down the path, past several trees and bushes. A clearing came up in a while, with patio furniture set. Sitting there was Rüstesihan, sitting with Shaun. Rüstesihan was dressed in his usual black robes, fully covered from head to toe, careful to conceal everything except his hands. Shaun wore his glasses midway on the ridge of his nose, wearing a simple white-collar shirt with khakis. His dark brown hair was a bit long, denoting that he casually assumed this form, though combed. Both deep in a conversation, Shaun immediately reacted to Shauna's presence, rather than my own. They are directly linked, so I expected that. When I caught his soft gaze, he winked, a sign of welcome. We both walked over to them and grabbed two chairs. The table had a tea tray occupied with a platter of finger foods, mostly small cakes. Rüstesihan poured us both cups and continued his conversation with Shaun.

"Adamasy-Shaun, you should know better," Rüstesihan said, waving a ladyfinger at him. "Who could have seen that coming?" Shaun retorted, looking nonchalantly away from Rüstesihan, sipping on his tea. Shauna looked at me, "One of the youths got angry enough to decide that one of Adam's galaxies weren't worth having around." Shaun looked slightly annoyed with her, peering over his glasses he responded, "It wasn't just a galaxy! A bloody fine work of art, it was! I had living creatures in there! How kids could arbitrarily decide to blow up things is beyond my comprehension." Rüstesihan and Shauna immediately threw him a knowing glare accompanied with smirks. "Fine, I do know better, but the odds of the kid getting that angry?" Rüstesihan dropped his ladyfinger into his tea then went for the biscotti. "What will be the punishment?" Rüstesihan said. Shauna looked at them both, "Liliel will be dealt with according to law." Shaun's eyes widen but subtly so quickly responded, "She's too young for our antiquated laws. We don't even like our laws." "Speaking of which, shouldn't we be working on changing those laws?" Rüstesihan chipped in. "You know bloody well that all angels have to be present to decide on the changing of laws," Shauna said. "Well, aren't you a little tipsy scale of justice Lilia-Shauna," Rüstesihan remarked with sly grin. "That law is all I know, it's what I helped to create. If we want to change them, then I think all those who are subject to it should agree upon it. And you're right; Liliel may or may not get a harsh punishment. She's a wild card and so would be those that judge her."

"Pressing matters!" Rüstesihan called into the sky. Shauna, Shaun, and Rüstesihan diverted their attention to some other spot in the garden. When I looked over, I could see the figure of Daniel slowly walking over. As his figure gained clarity, I felt Azrael and Jibril coming as well. Another table appeared with more chairs as each figure or each essence moved closer. When I could see with my eyes these three people, I felt a few other beings, but none so close and not as strong. Their names are

written on their souls, names they chose. The names of Dorcas, a breed of human and snake; Melisande, biotis, blend of human and bird; and Keir, a grimoire.

Finally the entire group was present and ready for the actual meeting. Jibril with his long dark blue hair stretching down to the back of his legs, wearing a white shirt and black pants. He wore a simple black-banded watch on his left. I looked over at Shaun's wrist and sitting comfortably was a simple bracelet. I knew that he had his pocket watch tucked away somewhere else. Jibril's eyes were a light blue and held a serious look on his face. Azrael blonde hair was short and he wore a black tee shirt with jeans. His sharp green eyes pierced everything, although his face was quite soft, which undermined the glared he gave everyone. Though Melisande wasn't present, Dorcas and Keir joined the formed group. Dorcas looked human, with olive skin and black eyes. She was thin and looked quite refined, well aged; she looked like she was in her late forties, with long straight black hair. Keir was but a grimoire with no form. So we all sat.

"The Marquisate's beloved possession, the only human to seek the love of angels and win it," Dorcas said with accusatory tone. Daniel shocked by this, moved back a little. He sat right next to her, so he extended his hand over hers. "Dorcas, we're beyond that point. He didn't seek them; I sought him. I'm the one who did this," he said to her. Dorcas looked over him carefully, "You may have spoken for the good Ra and given him the chance, but he could've refused." The angels all sighed in desperation or as a sign that they were not amused. Rüstesihan joined their exasperation but then said, "Dorcas, we didn't invite you to hear you ramble about that sort. You're a representative of biotis', so kindly behave." Dorcas looked around, "A representative? Millions of biotis' and you choose one single person to be here. Why is there no representative of humans or animals then?" Rüstesihan raised him hand. She shot him a look, "No human lives for hundreds of years to call himself human." "Look there were no representatives for the trial, why should there be one for this?" Jibril said. "What is this?" I interjected.

I could feel Rüstesihan smile under that hood. "You are to be my apprentice," he responded. "Only if you want," he added quickly. I wanted to know what other choices were of avail. Azrael responded to that thought out loud. "First of all, you have a vast amount of knowledge, I wouldn't say infinite, but a decent amount. You have to learn to sort it through. Which is why you should spend time – true dedicated time to learning and cultivating that knowledge." "We thought that maybe you'd want to do it with one of us, but being with us may cloud you're learning. You can still be with us, just not learn with us," Shaun said with a soft smile. "My options are with one of you whom is present here now?" Jibril gave me a cold glare, "You're right. Except," he paused to shoot a glare at Dorcas, "we didn't know she'd be so upset. There are also animals if you'd prefer or humans. If you'd like to go amongst biotis'," he stopped to smirk at her again, "they are a great species to study. Most are absolutely friendly to the point of loving exhaustion. Some are pretentious idiots because of their status."

"What comes after learning?" I asked. "Living," Azrael said in an uncertain tone. "One must learn but then experience. You think that you'll always look down on us because of what we did to you? There's always a reason. I'd tell you the reason now if it wouldn't break your concept of emotions. Then Adam and Lilith would be severely mad at me. I could handle one, but to have Adam mad at me? Perish the thought!" Azrael winked at Shaun, who then smiled. I watched his cheeks flush with colour as he tried to hide his emotions. "Break it then and allow me to learn to disengage that which I've come to take for granted," I responded with as much strength as I could. "Lilith and Jibril will die one day, thus leaving this entire play pen to us. Our children in turn will take it away. With the knowledge that you are destined to accumulate, you will be of help to the ruling class after us and after them. Why do you think everyone wants to know what it's like for you? If they have what you know, then they don't need you.

The problem is, although I don't need you, I want you. Same for Jibril, Dorcas, or Kier, maybe even Rüstesihan, though I doubt any of them will admit it. But." Azrael stopped. "As for us," Shauna began. "We need you," Shaun continued. "Either because we love you," Shauna picked up. "Or that we've made ourselves so dependent on you, that we feel lost with you." "Such as a child to a parent, or a lover to another," I ended.

"You should study with me. I'm slightly insane. I like to pretend that I'm sixteen sometimes. I joke around. I like long walks on the beach and renting movies. It'll be like the worse dating service you've ever not tried," Rüstesihan said happily. I felt puzzled and intrigued with this entire thing. Before I answered Rüstesihan, I said to Azrael, "That didn't break my emotions." He shrugged, "That was only one of several possibilities. I didn't want to hurt you, not yet. Eventually, actually very shortly, you'll come to see everything that we've been hiding from you." I nodded, for that was all that I could do. "Then I will study with Rüstesihan at the school." I reached out for Shauna's hand, "So long as I can remain with her." Jibril twitched a little, "Fine." Shauna looked over at him and gave him a little wink. A part of me felt the jealousy that I would have experience before, but another part reminded me that just as Azrael is the only one who could really comfort Adam because together they were one complete unified being; the same was for Jibril and Lilith.

It's difficult to appendage these new thoughts with what happened before this time. The world wasn't new; I was new to the world. Every part of me still believed that I was human, but I am; yet I wasn't. Was I experiencing enough turmoil or too much? If only there was someone else that I could speak to whom knew this transition.

I watched the others depart, leaving me behind with Shaun, Shauna, and Rüstesihan. Shaun gathered all our cups to put them aside as Shauna poured us all new glasses. "How's Vincent?" Shauna asked Shaun. "Doing well, Uye watches over him more carefully then I would have imagined." The rest of our time in the garden was spent like this. Talking over the smaller more unimportant factors that make life worth it.

All the meanwhile, I sat in almost complete silence wondering when I will be able to join them happily in this sort of discussion. Even Rüstesihan was able to carry along. I knew that each was hoping to drag me into the conversation, but too unwilling to drag me in where I didn't want to be. Several times, either Shaun or Shauna would reach over to give me their hand or wink, trying to provide comfort. Soon I would begin the training that would make me normal.

The world will lose its vibrant colours completely, a distaste in my mouth. Yet it will remain just as beautiful. There will be pain and suffering. Yet I had a long way to go. In human years, there's an age of reaching maturity when you should be able to handle everything that goes on, or at least what you think is going on. The fact is that you never are old enough to fully understand or handle such things in the world. You have to shut the door on certain factors in order to better sustain life. Life lost its colour, but it remains a struggle of figuring out whether or not it's worth it. When you're an angel (I must find a better term, for I do not like thinking of myself as an angel, it seems too much), there is no age. Azrael, the second oldest, took a few millions of years to figure out his purpose. Lilith and Jibril almost destroyed the world in learning that they are a complete being that should never be together. Whether Adam has learned a lesson or not is still in the air. Even poor Liliel in her anguish destroyed something only to find that she possesses that power. You can learn the theories, but the application is vital.

When we finally decided to part, Shaun and Shauna walked alongside of me. Shauna to my left and

Shaun to my right, silence befell us as we walked away from the greenhouse. “Where are we going? Where am I to stay?” I asked. Shaun and Shauna looked at each other as if trying to find the right answer so that I won’t be upset. “We both lack bodies in the human world. That’s all you know. Either you return to the human world or you reside elsewhere,” Shauna said. “Anywhere but the castles in Ithua,” I responded. Shaun chuckled, “Cravie, we normally stay with the human realms. We don’t own estate in planes of biotis, for they live without rules and such. They are rather amoral creatures. Although that sort is akin to our hearts, when survival and bare necessities is of utmost importance, there’s a lack of property or value. Any other place you can stay is void of life, which I’m sure you don’t want.” “You can live on the school grounds if you’d prefer,” Shauna offered. “Eventually that won’t be enough,” I said, more sadly than I intended to. “True, but with the constant student running around, I doubt you’ve have enough time to think about that,” she answered. “She’s right, that’s the only place that is constantly busy without consideration to time,” Shaun added.

“What do I call you? What do I call myself?” I asked them. “What do you want to call us?” she said looking out at the distance. “What do you want me to call you?” I answered with a slight jest. “Call us by what you see,” Shaun said. The sad realization of watching the names or the facades of two people I loved most died in that spot. However, the greatest joy was that the two people I loved grew into the beings they were. This wasn’t their facade; I had them as they had me. My name is Eric Craven and I belong to Adam and Lilith, just as they belong to me. I am the creation of their other halves, meaning that Azrael and Jibril created me for this purpose. But Destiny allowed me to change something; Daniel intervened and gave me a purpose. Now I had to find this purpose. Whatever it was, it enough to remember that my first lesson as this being was that I am now what I always was. What I am going to be. I am everything I am not. For as long as I live for myself, I can accept the challenges to love and hate.

When that donned on me, Adam and Lilith smiled. Adam’s bright glow took him underground as Lilith’s black wings took to air. I followed her with my gray wings to Rüstesihan’s school.

Unveiling Our Light

CHAPTER TWENTY-FIVE

Monday, April 10, 2006 2:13AM

I followed her to a place I had been before. This time, the odor that once required me to wear an oxygen mask had dissipated. As she landed beside me, my memory served that she had no wings of her own. “You’re right,” she said, looking beyond the trees, “that doesn’t mean I can’t borrow.” The field of trees where the tree of life once stood was where we found ourselves. As we walked on, I realized that I had not seen this specific place with Adam. We walked up to a small budding tree. I realized that this was my own tree. “It’s a small ash that’s been growing in your name for a few years now.”

We walked on to the building in silence. “Do you know where Rüstesihan’s school is located?” she asked, as we got closer to one of the buttresses. The building was tall with six buttresses each with three flying buttresses that attached it to the looming black central tower. “Gothic architecture,” she murmured, “dark and dreary on the outside, an amazing labyrinth on the inside.” She held out her hand to navigate her words. “Above ground is the workings and daily nonsense that they engage in. Far within the depths of earth, as far as possible, extending beyond traces of life, is where the current ‘backbone’ is kept,” she said, pointing to each. The backbone, the Geisha, the human appointed index of all information that would be subject to death just as any normal one would. Though she didn’t remain deep below the ground, she was guarded well and kept under strict surveillance. There are only two people alive at any given time that knows everything – the one who knows and is teaching the next

who is learning. The one being taught is never revealed till the death of the one preceding. “In the middle though, there is Rüstesihan’s school. Rare will you find someone who isn’t an angel that knows that bit. Usually one travels to his school through mirrors, never by walking up to this building. It’s agreement between all who exists that the former location of the tree on frequented by all. So is the case of the school being here.”

We walked past the buttresses to a small door on the building. She walked through the door and I followed. Inside, it looked as any office would. People scurry back and forth tending to their jobs. Some scuffled their papers while other drank coffee while laughing. They paid no attention to us, the two whom just walked in. Lilith headed right and we continued down the corridor, watching everyone else at work. Several turns and twists later, we ended up in an elevator. When we got in, she produced a small black card. Carefully she pronounced a name that shocked me, “Aliesha Tannen-Raganavok.” The elevator paused while a glass sheet went up in the back and the metal moved away. A glass elevator descended, lining up perfectly with the missing back. After the two locked together, the glass sheet of the elevator we were in and the pane of the other elevator moved away, allowing us to get in. We got in and after a few second, a few lights flickered across, insuring that no one was in the way, or at least safe from the closing. The glass pane of our elevator went up, as did the one on the other one that we just got up from. She leaned on side of the glass elevator. “Make yourself comfortable,” she said with a smile. I looked at the outside of the elevator and watched as it dropped us quickly.

Down we went, past the natural light filtering in, into the darkness. Small blue and white lights glowed so that we could see within the glass elevator, but outside of it, was only darkness. After a while, the space allotted for the other elevator vanished, leaving room only for this elevator. She came over to hug me as the darkness overcame us. Soon the lights didn’t matter, as the darkness crept in we could only hear the whirring of the mechanics at work. I held her close knowing that eventually I’d be in another home.

I closed my eyes and kissed her softly.

The light came flooding in. “Our stop,” she said happily, tugging me out of the elevator. We stepped into a blue hallway. A right until we came across another hallway to our right, which we went down. Down this hallway was a dark field. I looked over it in awe, “Is that an actual field?” “Yes, but be careful, some things are just an illusion in there. The night sky is an illusion, but the tree and the field is not,” she answered. As we got closer she stopped. “To your left is Adam’s house. That’s where he stayed when he undertook training and lessons. You’re free to go there whenever you’d like.” “I looked over to see the steps leading up to a big door. It looked like a mansion was dropped there. “That’s a mansion,” I began. She nodded, “Rüstesihan was and still is very fond of him. He made sure he was outfitted with any and everything possible. Naturally, Adam being who he is, rejected it for something less lavish, but after the birth of Uye, became less resistant to actually using the place. Though he still doesn’t use it much.” I looked down to the right to find a similar structure. “Whose is that?” Lilith looked over and pursed her lips. “Mine, same deal though. I’ve never used it, never had a reason to.” “I’m supposed to stay at two houses that you both rejected?” I teased. “No, this is now yours,” she said thoughtfully, looking at the house that was hers. Slightly shocked, I stared at the house. “Mine? Your house is now mine because...?” She began walking towards it, “Because an apprentice of Rüstesihan needs to be here. Needs to have something that is his or her own to retreat to. I don’t need this, but you do.”

We walked up the stairs of the mansion to the large ornate blue doors with beautiful light fixtures. She walked through the door, as did I. When we got in, the inside was bare. The walls were bare and dark;

there was only a fireplace with seats arranged in a circle around it. There was a gold elevator to the right and along the top was a walkway. I had been here before but something didn't seem right. It seemed so unlike her, no wonder she didn't want this as her own. Upon thinking that, she turned to me with an embarrassed look. "Sorry," she said, and then walking over to some light switches on the wall, beside the entrance. She fiddled around with a few till light came flooding in. Yes, now I remember, the fireplace, for one portion of the room, there were no walls, just glass panes. The curtains moved to reveal an eerie light that was reminiscent of the sun. There was even the ocean outside of these panes. I walked over to that side watching the waves crash into one another. "A few more clicks, the staircase leading up the rooms will appear. You'll have to make the place more comfortable, but it should suffice till then. And that golden elevator will take you directly to Rüstesihan and back," she said walking towards me. "Shall I remain?" I thought it over carefully, for I did not want to be alone, but the moment called for. "Would it trouble you to return a bit later?" She nodded and turned to leave.

I stepped back to look over everything carefully. In this room, the glass panes reached high into the ceiling. It constituted one fourth of the entire room, taking up that entire piece. The fireplace stood alone with no backing, reaching high beyond the ceiling. A few feet behind it the glass panes and the wall met. The furniture, though scattered meant that Jibril used this place most likely -- I could only assume. Certainly I was not familiar with how Rüstesihan treated his students, but I am sure that anyone who was a dedicated student or apprentice would be afforded such luxuries, thus not allowing others to use it at leisure. Azrael would most likely frequent Adam's house in search of that completeness. I went back over to the light switch to play around with it. Within a short while, I was able to figure out which clicks would draw the curtains, light the room, open the door (how useless), and finally, drop the staircase. That click came quickly, so I turned to see the walkway along the sides above adjust to drop a decent sized stairway. From afar it looked flimsy, but as I got closer, I realized it was a sturdy thing, beautifully designed for when one didn't feel like using their wings (provided they had that). I grabbed hold of the gold banister and climbed up. It struck me that choosing gold for this place might have been a mistake as since Lilith never appreciated gold. Perhaps Adam was intended to take this place and she the other. Whatever the case, as I got up to the walkway, the thoughts vanished as my eyes fell on the three ornate doors appeared; all of which were equally and well spaced from the other. This place wasn't bare minimum; it was just carefully hidden.

I opened the first door, which was black with cross on the gold handle and a small window with gold frame. The gold frame was decorated quite nicely with black ink and flourish. I couldn't see through the window though, for all I could see was black. Above the handle was something small in writing that I couldn't understand. I opened the door to find six large mirrors standing side by side. The room itself had blue velvet hanging of the walls which created a dark setting. There was one ebony chair and a white marble chair on each side of the room, each just as decorated as the gold frame of the window. I pushed the door to look out the window to see my name written across in calligraphy writing. I checked the doorknob to see if there was any writing above it, but there was none. I left that room to check the next.

The second door was dark blue with silver designs all over it. The center had a silver door knocker and just below that was a small handle. The door had nothing else, so I decided to first pull on the handle. The silver swirls began changing into small stars. I then decided to push it, which gained no action on door's behalf. I lifted the silver ring and let it drop, then pulled the door. Nothing. I lifted the ring again and then pushed. The door swung open, into another room that was just as dark as the one before. I checked for lights since I couldn't see anything at all, not even light from the outside spilled in to illuminate anything. I flipped a switch to find that it was a painting room. Two easels were in the center, with brushes and paints that lined the tables. Everything untouched. There was even a lone

violin in one of the corners. Jibril was here then, for of the four, he's the only one that plays that instrument. If memory serves correct, that is his most beloved material possession. I left turning off the light. This was definitely intended for Lilith because she's the only one that would find the beauty of an art room.

The final door was brown with a carved window. Beside the door was an empty picture frame. The door itself had nothing else on it. I stared at these items, trying to figure out what to do. First I pushed at the door, which did nothing. I then leaned against it trying to figure out what the picture frame might be doing there. Then it occurred to me to just walk through, which I then did. On the other side of the door was a living room. There was a fireplace with a sofa across from it. A doorway to my right lead to a kitchen and to my left was a descending staircase. I walked over to the sofa and checked the small coffee table beside it. On the top of the glass was a lamp and I could see that on the second shelf of this table was a telephone. I walked over to the kitchen, suddenly feeling the desire to wear something else. By the time I got into the kitchen, I looked down at my black pants and short sleeved white button down collared shirt. I went over to the refrigerator to find it fully stocked with fresh foods. I took out a can of coke and sat at the table within the kitchen. As I sat there looking around, I heard the phone ring so I left the can standing alone to go answer it.

"Cravie dear, you got in safely!" Rüstesihan boomed over the phone. "Yes, Rüstesihan. Everything is fine so far," I answered. The impracticality of having such a decorated phones. I had to pull it off the shelf and then place it on the top. "Sorry if some of the items are not to your liking, we'll have them replaced," he said. "It's fine, it'll take some time to get used to," I said casually. "You'll like the bedroom phone better. We were in some sort of a rush with things that we didn't replace all the phones." "Where is the bedroom?" Rüstesihan paused, "Outside of that door, the wooden one, there's an empty picture frame right?" I answered him. "Okay that has nothing to do with anything. I left it there by accident. Actually it's mine so when you come up, be sure to return it," he said. I sighed into the phone, "Fine. But the bedroom?" "When you're outside of the door, step away from it, about as far as where the picture frame is, just be sure to clear the door frame. When you do that, just say your name and the passageway will appear. When it appears, the bedroom will be over to your left, the stuff to your right will remain the same. Which reminds me, the staircase in your living room, you see it?" I looked at the phone incredulously; "Of course I see it." "Well don't ever go down those stairs. Doom awaits you!" he said boisterously. "Just kidding. Actually those stairs will lead you out to that wonderful beach you've got there. Well, time to go be a grown up. If you'll excuse me. Oh and don't be late, we are meeting in exactly eight hours, nine minutes and forty seconds. Exactly," he said. Before I could even think of a response, he hung up.

As much as I wanted to go to the beach, I realized that I should check out my room first. I went outside and followed his instructions carefully. The second I said, "Eric Craven," the bottom half of the doorway extended across the room. I began walking on it and when I got to the other side, a doorway with no door was present. Walking through, I found a small sitting room with curtains all around. Possibly a lavish for Lilith rather than myself. I moved the curtains aside to find light pouring in. As I pushed the curtain, I realized that this was the room itself. Half of the room was done in windowpanes so that light from their "beach" could come filtering in. The bed was backed against an actual wall and it was large with a comforter, sheets and pillows. Beside it to the right was a nightstand with three shelves. The top had a lamp, the second with a few books and the third with the phone (of much more practical design). To the left of the bed was a silk screen with minimal paintings on it. I walked over to the other side to find that it had clothes hung across neatly. This screen extended far and along the bottom was a shoe rack. Midway, there was a double door, which I opened to find a large bathroom. The kitchen and the living room together made up my bathroom. The bedroom itself was as large as

two of the bathrooms were. It was almost as if they tried to keep the same idea with my home in Australia.

Walking back over to the other side, I went down the stone staircase that twisted a bit. At its end, I found a library packed with books. I ran my hand against the spine and walked through. Around the corner, there was a stone entrance to the “beach” with no door or anything to protect the books from the air or water. It occurred to me that the beach might be an illusion. I took a few steps, enough to know that the sand was real. I took off my shoes and continued to check it. The ‘sun’ was awfully bright, but did well at imitating the real sun. I walked to the ‘water’ to see if that was real or not. Listening to the waves crash upon one another, the water finally reached up to me. Yes, it was real, though how much of it was real I couldn’t tell. How possible was it to have a beach this far below ground... in the middle of a field?

I walked back past the library up the stairs with the shoes in my hands. Pulling the door open, the passageway was now missing. I walked over to the staircase that led me up here and walked down. I went over to the lone fireplace and just waited. I took some of the blankets and spread them out so that I could just sit in the sun. I wondered when would Lilith return. I wondered about several things, but found myself drifting asleep. I struggled against sleep till a familiar person joined me. “What’s the most beautiful creature alive?” she asked. Drowsily I replied, “Butterflies.” “Really? I would’ve thought snakes or spiders.” “How surprising, I would have thought that you would say cats.” “The sounds of the worlds will continue to churn and in this light, we’re drowsily talking about pretty objects.” “Sounds normal, if you ask me,” I responded, putting my hand over her mouth.

Time line **Briefings**

CHAPTER TWENTY-SIX

Friday, April 14, 2006 12:41:14 AM

Angelic History, Brief

00. Pharaoh and Ailuros come into consciousness or existence.
01. All known species (568) except other angels are continually created and destroyed.
02. Lilith created by accident with no real form or purpose.
03. Azrael created in replication of what occurred with Lilith, however forged with intent.
04. Jibril created to balance out Lilith.
05. Several minor angels are created: Mikhail, Sephiroth, Aurora, Lehnial, Torren, etc.
06. Adam created. Immediately favoured by Ailuros, thus the most protected and revered.
07. Several more angels are created. It is discovered each new generation is considerably less powerful than the one previously. They would have to engulf those ahead to gain said enhancements or “birth rights.”
08. Ra and Persia roughly created during this time. Ra is put into the human cycle system to keep record and watch over any who enter that sort of life cycle. Ra takes a part of his being and puts it into his creation, Lahni. She is allowed to live in the human cycle and mate. The essence shifts to the firstborn of every generation when they are ready to handle the responsibility.
09. Azrael interrupts code and alters destiny. Put on trial by Pharaoh and Ailuros and fails judgment. Further alters destiny for Jibril and Lilith, who must serve human cycle.
10. Ahnaleaha, the first sahjina (angel and human breed) created by Azrael and human wife.
11. Azrael put on trial again, by Lilith and Jibril. Passes and fixes the alterations he placed on them earlier.
12. Rebellion of the younger generations of angels occurs, enticing the war. Officially begins when

Persia (on order of Ailuros) attempts to destroy Lilith and Jibril.

13. Pharaoh aligns himself with the generation that follows his (Adam, Azrael, Jibril, and Lilith) thus bringing about his own destruction.

14. Several angels destroyed, as well as major casualties across all planes within every species. Due to this, twin soul collectors were created in order to aid the current "Ra," (Daniel) to watch over existence.

15. Most angels safely moved away, those lost returned to Ailuros (uneven distribution meant that she disrupted the balance). Removed Lilith's soul. Jibril destroys Ailuros, takes her into his being and then reunited with Lilith causing existence to vanish. Asura created within this moment.

16. Asura able to find Sephiroth, whom together pried them apart and began to restore life.

17. The life created was thought to be destroyed (later discovery revealed that Sephiroth and Asura had merely shifted it to another plane). The plane of human existence was resurrected to prior to the war.

18. Uliaha Yashmira followed by Vincent Zamaan, sahjinahs were created by Adam and his human wife. Vincent Zamaan was initially intended to be a vessel for Sariel.

19.

Additional information deemed unimportant as this time, thus not available. Please note that information was stripped for your protection.

Extrapolated from Rüstesihan's record. All dates are roughly within human standard timing.

1961: Common soul rerouted and becomes Trevor Dhanraj Ganesh. (This family is not related to the Mahesa line, but they were selected candidates to host an angel).

1979: Azrael enters human life cycle as Seen Ganesh in New York, brother to Trevor. (Altered data: Believed to have lived simultaneous lives).

1972: Azrael and Jibril create a new soul, but provide specific instructions on the care for this particular soul till its time of birth.

1973: Azrael selects the body to which the soul will be hosted in. Born to Miha & Acelin, the soul becomes Eric Craven Raganavok and is born in Australia.

1974: Adam enters his sixteenth human cycle, as Shaun Tannen in California.

1975: Common soul is altered by Azrael and rerouted to a new body in India. Born as Teri Mukerjee.

1978: Shaun's parents die in the car accident leaving him to the foster care system. (Lilith was due to be born under the same parents as Aleisha Rahila during the scheduled year of birth [1984]). Trevor married Coline Persad.

1981: Shaun is adopted by Trevor and Coline.

1984: Lilith's three hundred and fifteenth life cycle as Ahnaliyah Ganesh comes to an end and is reborn as Shauna in New York. Jibril enters his two hundred and fifteenth cycle as Christopher in England.

1986: Coline, Shaun's foster mother, is murdered.

1987: Eric moves to England with his parents.

1992: Shaun moves to England to attend the university, where he and Eric meet.

1993: Eric accompanies Shaun on a visit home. Teri moves to England to attend the university.

1994: Shaun meets Teri.

1998: Renee Mersieux is removed from cycle to deny certain events from occurring.

1999: Shaun marries Teri.

2000: Trevor, Shaun's foster father, commits suicide.

2002: Mikhail's thirty-first human cycle system ends as Farrouz Rashad. Reenters for the thirty-second time. Rerouted to India as Nahit.

2004: Uliaha Yashmira is born to Shaun and Teri. Eric and Shauna begin dating.

2006: Vincent Zamaan, second child to Shaun and Teri is born. Eric and Shauna marry.

2007: Torren enters fifty-first life cycle as Vahalia along with Khalil as Vahe, twins to Christopher.

2009: Nahit is adopted by Eric and Shauna.

2010: Sephiroth as Arjun Mathur ends fifty-seventh cycle. Reenters for his fifty-eighth, special request to be born under Lilith granted. Born as Christopher Andre (Risan) in New York. Nahit begins lessons at the school (Rüstesihan).

2016: Risan begins lessons at the school (Rüstesihan).

2018: Lilith ends her three hundred and sixteenth human cycle. Begins as Monserrat Benett, in Arizona. Jibril ends his two hundred and sixteenth human cycle, but does not enter another. Instead chooses to live on another plane.

2028: Eric Craven dies, but is converted to an angel based on Daniel's objections. Lilith and Adam also end their cycles to live on various planes.

Overture: The Tide Washes Over and Requiem for the New Beginning

CHAPTER TWENTY-SEVEN

December 31, 2006

I awoke to the feel of fingers brushing through my hair. My opened to find Lilith on top of me brushing through. Light pervaded her as I looked over to find myself atop the soft sands. We were at the beach that was near the house. "During your rest, you wanted to be here, so you drifted along till you found the right spot," she murmured. I stared back into her brownish red eyes and black mess of ringlets. She jumped up and then extended her hand in offerings to pull me up.

My eyes quickly adjusted to the bright light as we walked back into the house. "I had to wake you up somehow and that way the best way," she admitted with a grin. Her hands were clasped behind her back as she half heartily skipped. I followed her quietly registering that I had to be at Rüstesihan's quarters shortly. I tabulated the time spent in my head, while watching her figure dance along the sand. She was wearing a black peasant skirt with a white top. Her hair, though long, wasn't at the usual length which normally reaches to the back of her knees.

"Wake up, you are still sleeping." I had awoken to find myself on a plane to Japan where I would meet with old friends. I would see her and wonder what became of this path and where I am in time. Right now however, I must wonder about my very existence. I looked to my left and noted the people asleep beside me then looked at the clouds. Beneath them somewhere was the ocean that swallowed things whole. It was calm and beautiful yet chaotic inside. I looked at my hand and wondered to myself if I was an angel or still an apprentice. Was that all a dream or was it real? How am I supposed to know anything if all they ever do is change it all?

Sometimes I wonder how I got here; here in specific. It is warm outside, I can feel the warmth of the sun infiltrating the house and falling upon me. There are other people in this room, four to be exact all of which were deep in conversation and I just walked in and sat here by the fireplace. Three of them do not know that this fireplace does not work; in fact it is a doorway that can only be used by Adam and me. One of them I once loved and the pang in my heart of him being here, I know I still do. Yet I sit here despondent and craving a cigarette yet I have never smoked before. That's a lie; I did once ten years ago and discovered that I was not fond of such an action. Still, I continue to watch the blue bird that is hidden away in a tree nearby. I silently go through my itinerary as I reflect about where I need to go and what is going to happen next. Eric just left for Turkey asking me to recall an old path that we know is no longer an option.

"I have been with you both for years now. Often I wonder if at my age I should give up the chase of your ghosts and return to a quiet peaceful life," he said. I looked at him and found that I had no response. I wanted to say that I was sorry. "It is not that I have nothing to show for my life; I have plenty. I got to keep the angels company and that speaks volumes in and of itself. Someday I would like to rest though," he said without looking at me. He pulled himself together and headed to the airport and left me there sitting on the floor next to the faux fireplace. Sometimes I wonder where I went wrong but I am never allowed to do that for too long. There is always a reminder...

The Knave, or rather Ix Taijin Rabinath was present sure enough to remind me of my place. Shortly I would leave this country in flight of another just as Adam will do the same. I gave up a life of wallowing pity, weakness, and self torment for one where I am always in servitude of another. There was no difference between this life and the one before; in both I am lying to myself completely. In the end, no one ever gets what they want, no matter what the path or destiny has been telling them. That was the flaw of Eric and it was the proposed flaw of this existence I was living.

I do not crave anything nor do I actually need anything. I do not need to be in service to anyone nor do I need to help anyone. I could be more selfish but I have always felt that there are two types in the world, those that take and those that give. I digress though. One day I will return to the being that I really am so... sadly none of this matters. Instead of crying over the person that I love most in that room, I'll pick myself up, get cleaned up, change my clothes, pack my small bag and head to another country. I'll pretend none of this happened. That I did not see him and I did not speak with anyone, that my time here in this place was a fantasy and move on.

Wearily I made my way of the stairs into my room and into the bathroom. This was the house that Trevor built for me so my room was unusually dark yet if I pulled back all the blinds it would reveal windows that light could pour through. My room was always dark yet easily light could penetrate while Adam's room was unusually bright and could always be ushered into the dark. This was strange considering that he detested bright rooms. While I pampered myself I could hear the maid, Ria (that name might be wrong, I've been rather forgetful as of late), trying to get my bag prepared. There was not much since it was a messenger bag with a change of clothes, a toothbrush, and toothpaste – bare essentials. Adam always had more luggage especially since his capabilities as a doctor was more revered. Thus all of the running around must be for his items rather than mine. He and I would leave at the same time as since our flights were at the same time, just to different places. I should note that he was not in the room that I was in before, no he was off in his study handling family matters. Things that his late grandmother, Langley Ralphina (her proper name), or Tannen Marie (used for affectionate respect) left behind. Tannen Marie was quite crafty, though she extended her title to all those of the bloodlines, she stipulated marriage after her death. Adam was able to exempt me from this stipulation as since I am not technically of their heritage or bloodlines, rather my only connection is him which he was able to repair. His cousins Chase and Nicolas are having a much harder time with this latest surprise.

Adam is Shaun Tannen, just in case you've forgotten. I am still Shauna, except that everything has changed all because of one event. That is the way life is. What would you do if you were told that you were an angel destined for great things?

I changed it all.

Is this real? I wondered to myself. She just looked at me and said simply, "Yes." At one time we were lovers, who eventually married and then had children. Do you still want that? No, not because I do not but because I do, of my own merit. It will not be because it was created for her but that we cultivated it on our own.

The Abrupt Exodus

CHAPTER TWENTY-EIGHT

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"You could lead a thousand life times my love, but it only takes one to change everything that you have ever known or ever wanted to know. And that lesson that I have offered you in this fleeting moment, millions have died for countless times to learn," she said with a slight yawn, skipping ahead. I had become accustomed to her eccentricities that tend to change as often as she would change her hair. Glancing ahead I watched as the teal and white blended seamlessly into her jet black hair. Truth has a way of shedding light and casting away fears and doubts, yet those very exacting clarifying qualities can serve to destroy something so wonderful.

Into the arms of Chase she ran, a cousin from lifetime passed, whom which we had mutually decided upon visiting as a result of an extended wait at the airport. Certainly both she and I could arrive at our destination in a timely fashion without the wait, but it seems to only deduct from the time that we have with one another. She examined Chase carefully before allowing herself to be led into his office and I followed not too far behind. Immediately she gravitated towards the window which seemed to tower over the city, provided an ample view of everything we had not chosen to see. As I came alongside Chase, he shook my hand firmly with a smirk that seemed to say, "It was about time."

Time would never be kind to us – even though now, as I was, I could spend an eternity by her side, watching her many moods and outfits to go with them, it could not be afforded to me. I was granted two permissions that normally one could not attain and they were handed to me by the love of the two that crafted me into this position. My memory has not faded; but I shall always remember that it was Adam who gave me purpose and eternity on a pair of gray wings and Azura who delivered his creators.

And so, through all that I have been through – the two children that never really were mine but merely inhabited the flesh I assisted in creating for them, still heed me with some significance. The first name I was ever called was Eric and the only other name to ever hold as much significance was Ezeziel (Ericiel), which was carved into my soul forever to wear the allegiance to Adam and Lilith. Thus the two angels that are my senior still refer to me as Ezeziel-dono (or even Eri-dono) and still continue to act like children in my presence, begging for attention, even though they have far surpassed me in most things.

The transition into their world was simple enough. Perhaps the hardest part is the reconstruction which has left no mark or memory on me. The records remain of the anguish I suffered and even though I have no memory of my own to account for it, there is an account that I know of. As I reflect upon the "memoirs" I understand why they were necessary even if my memory was disjunctive.

Years or perhaps decades have passed since my birth and she, whom which I call Lilia, have remained together. We have not suffered another reincarnation on the human plane after the first and have taken to other planes sorting out matters there. That was the most logical decision as since Jibril has yet to return there either. Adam and Azrael continue on that plane however, continually escaping for brief moments that are always altered by Adam.

In my records many items were confused and misconstrued. At one point I felt responsible to straighten them out, however I felt that if one ought to leave a “legacy” or rather a chronicle behind, then it should never reveal the whole truth. It is much more colourful when made in a state that lacks clarity.

Lilia temporarily deferred her role as the fire element to me once she began to take more responsibility over lives. She had always done this, but now she truly the judge of all life – something Azrael willingly allowed her to do so that he could tend to other matters. It became clear that which each new angel created, the creator gave a part of themselves; meaning their identity and power and though that creation could rarely gain equal powers without the help of the other, the creator themselves suffered. A piece of them was lost till that creation died and returned to them.

“So long as we are responsible for our decisions, we cannot fail,” I said assertively to my class, peering over the book in hand. I looked at my students, loosely gathered in this small library. There seated in a corner was Sephiroth, mimicking blond eyes and pale green eyes. A slight curve of a smile revealed fangs which quickly vanished. Beneath the flesh he wore danced a green light shaped like a dragon. After I dismissed the class, I beckoned him over. “Something unusual occurred in level fourteen,” I said to him without looking up from the books I was sliding into my bag. “It is in poor form to randomly destroy life without maintaining the balance.” “Eri-dono, it needed to be rearranged. And who am I to question such a calling?” he shrugged.

And so ends the account of Ereziel. Most of the information he provided was during his birthing phase and thus means that it cannot be verified since his memories were altered and doctored. Ereziel and Lilith remain together and have created one angel together (supposedly a carving) whose name has been rumoured to be the angel Noeliel, however this data has been unconfirmed as since Ereziel and Lilith remain on the outer planes. During Ereziel's birth, Teri was still alive but died shortly after and was born Teriel. Furthermore, Asura's role has not been confirmed also attributed to his refusal to live on the human plane. (Signed, Kayleigh)

“This is the end of the world,” sighed the one known as Geisha.

SHAUNA SOLAMAN